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+

40 UNDER 40

21 UNDER 21

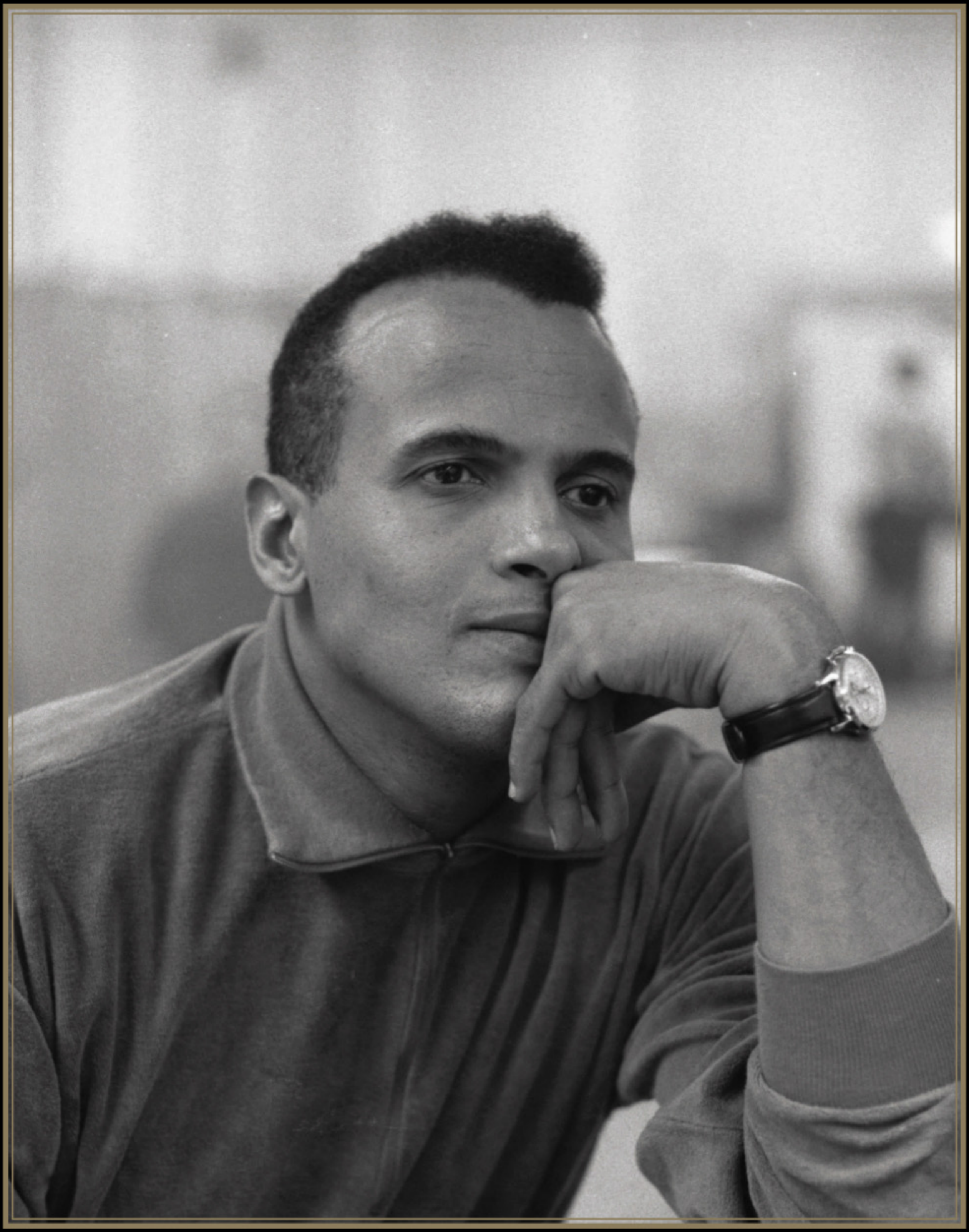
THE ICE AGE

HOW **ICE SPICE** BECAME 'THE PEOPLE'S PRINCESS' OF RAP

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Harry Belafonte



1927-2023

contents

MAY 13, 2023
VOLUME 135
NO. 6

Features

40

ICY HOT

Just two years after her debut single, viral Bronx rapper **Ice Spice** has scaled the charts and been dubbed "the People's Princess" by her fans. But she's still adjusting to the spotlight.

48

HOW TO BUILD AN EMPIRE

From its Bay Area headquarters, **EMPIRE** became a power player that shaped the way major competitors did business. Now it's an undeniable force in Africa and looking to replicate its success on a global scale — without losing its drive or identity.

56

40 UNDER 40

The minds powering the live industry's post-shutdown resurgence — along with next-gen forces from Capitol Hill to the silver screen — highlight *Billboard*'s annual celebration of the industry's young leaders.

MASTHEAD

5

BILLBOARD CHARTS

7

Rema and **Selena Gomez**'s "Calm Down" becomes the first track to top both the Mainstream Top 40 and Billboard U.S. Afrobeats Songs charts.

THE MARKET

19

"Dynamic music" promises to soundtrack life on demand — and in real time.

28

The co-founders of **Beatdapp** elaborate on their mission to fight streaming fraud, which they estimate cost rights holders $350 million in 2022.

THE SOUND

31

21 UNDER 21

This next generation of superstars is savvier than ever — and knows the importance of balancing nonstop careers with a shred of privacy, something that **d4vd** has already mastered.

THE PLAYERS

67

On the eve of the annual Music Biz conference in Nashville, Music Business Association president **Portia Sabin** describes its efforts to serve a wider scope of the industry than ever.

72

From Topeka to the world, classic rock band **Kansas** looks back on five decades of success.

CHARTBREAKER

76

Singer-songwriter **Paris Paloma** eyes a busy summer after "Labour" struck a chord with TikTok users.

ON THE COVER
Ice Spice photographed by Christian Cody on April 19 in New York.

TO OUR READERS
Billboard will publish its next issue on June 3. For 24/7 music coverage, go to billboard.com.

The Partners and staff of NKSFB mourn the passing of our colleague and friend, Michael Oppenheim.

We will miss his leadership, his friendship, and his generosity to everyone he came into contact with.

NKSFB
LLC

Clockwise from top left: Goyo, Emilia, Evaluna, Thalia, Becerra, Shakira and Gabriel photographed by David Cabrera on May 6 at Watsco Center in Coral Gables, Fla.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

ON MAY 6, NEARLY 2,000 FANS and hundreds of executives flocked to Miami's Watsco Center for a very special new *Billboard* event: a celebration of Latin music's most influential women, with compelling performances and riveting speeches delivered almost completely in Spanish. Millions more fans followed the action on social media or tuned in on Telemundo and Peacock to watch the program, *Mujeres Latinas en la Música*, which honored Shakira as Woman of the Year in her first public appearance since she moved to the United States. The event also saluted iconic singer-songwriter Ana Gabriel, up-and-coming Argentine songwriter Emilia, YouTuber-turned-singer Maria Becerra, Venezuelan sensation Evaluna, Afro-Colombian singer-activist Goyo and global powerhouse Thalia.

Ivy Queen, the godmother of reggaetón, hosted the show and premiered her own new single, "Toma," while Gabriel had the entire crowd belting out her anthem "Simplemente Amigos" along with her and received a standing ovation when she was presented with the Living Legend award.

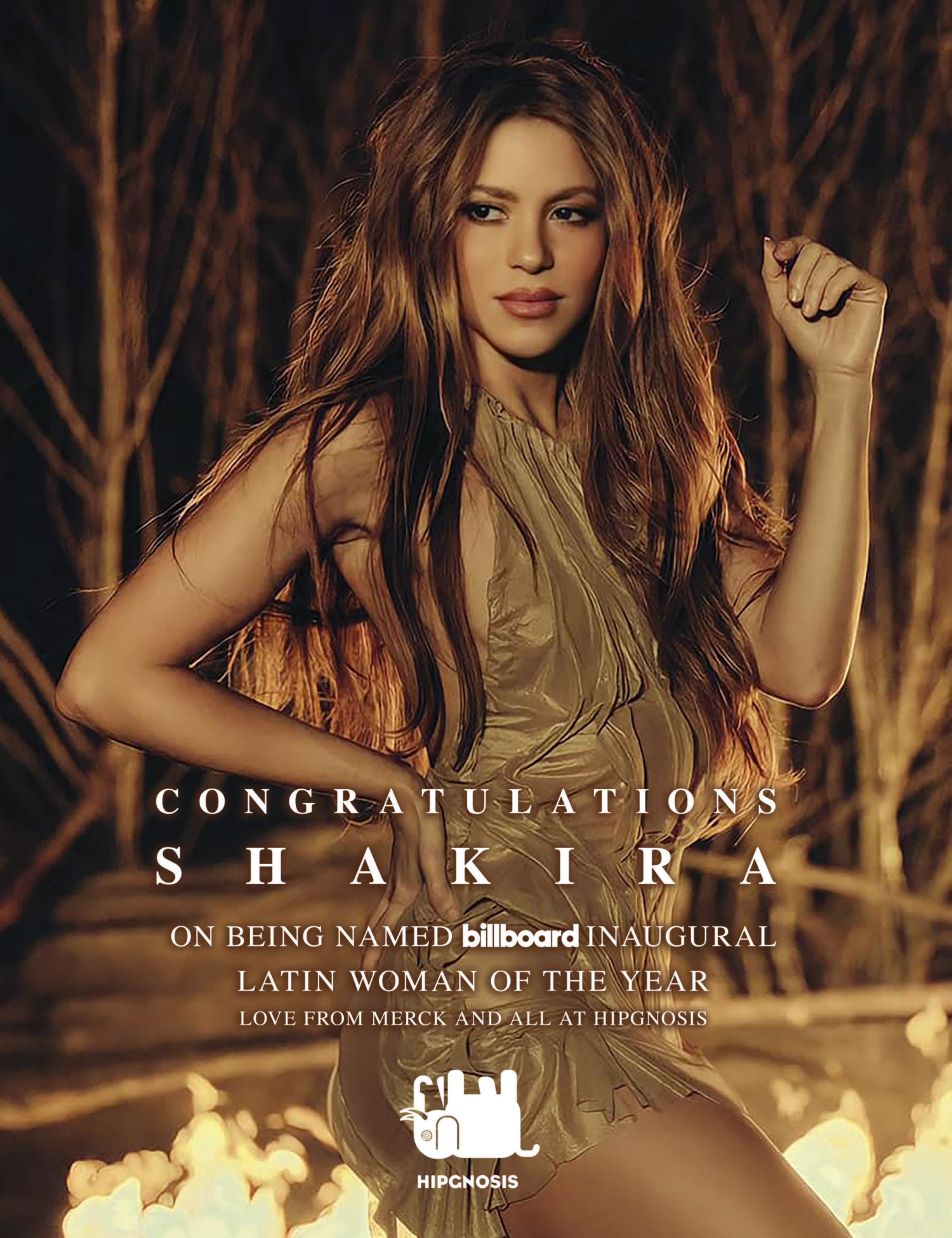
The evening marked an exciting new extension of *Billboard*'s beloved Women in Music franchise, which we launched nearly two decades ago as a list of music's most powerful women executives and hosted for the first time as a live gathering with artist honorees in 2007.

Since then, Women in Music has offered a magical room and a meaningful stage to even the biggest of stars, because, as Shakira said in her speech: "The most important lessons, I learned from other women, and for them, I wrote what I wrote and I sang what I sang."

We are thrilled to bring this celebration to a wider, Spanish-speaking audience — and we're proud to serve that audience every day on Billboard Español, which we launched in September and is now drawing over 1 million monthly readers. Please join us for next year's Women in Music and Latin Women in Music celebrations, which we hope will inspire women around the world to lead the music industry to new heights — whichever language they speak.

Hannah Karp
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

SET DESIGN BY NOAH REARDON



CONGRATULATIONS

SHAKIRA

ON BEING NAMED billboard INAUGURAL LATIN WOMAN OF THE YEAR

LOVE FROM MERCK AND ALL AT HIPGNOSIS

HIPGNOSIS

billboard

Hannah Karp
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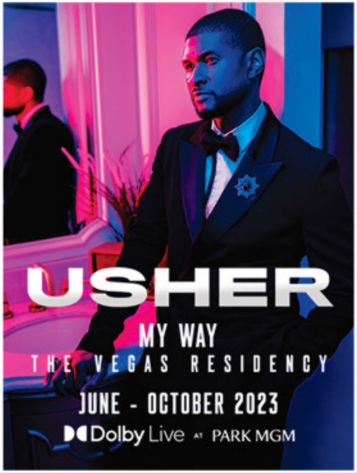
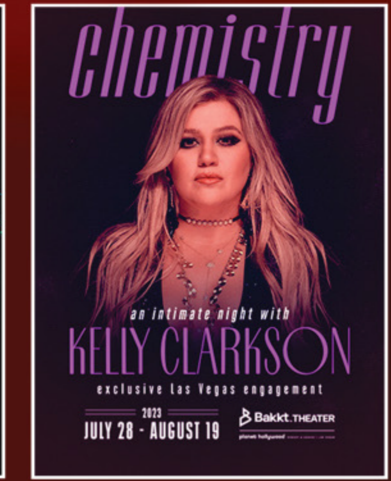
LIVE VEGAS


USHER
MY WAY
THE VEGAS RESIDENCY
JUNE - OCTOBER 2023
Dolby Live AT PARK MGM

KEITH URBAN
LIVE
"THE LAS VEGAS RESIDENCY"
JUNE 16 - JULY 1 & NOVEMBER 1-18
Bakkt THEATER
planet hollywood RESORT & CASINO

MAROON 5
M5LV
THE RESIDENCY
JULY 28 - AUGUST 12
Dolby Live AT PARK MGM

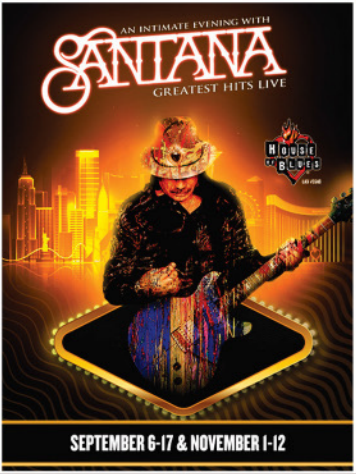

chemistry
an intimate night with
KELLY CLARKSON
exclusive las Vegas engagement
2023
JULY 28 - AUGUST 19
Bakkt THEATER

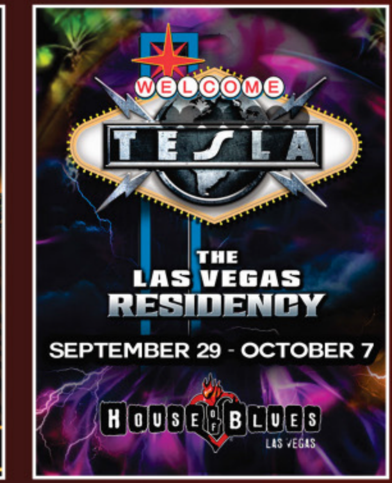
MIRANDA LAMBERT
Velvet Rodeo
THE RESIDENCY
NOW - DECEMBER 2023
Bakkt THEATER

JEFF DUNHAM
STILL NOT
CANCELED
JULY 16, SEPTEMBER 3, OCTOBER 22, NOVEMBER 12 & DECEMBER 8
Bakkt THEATER

ERIKA JAYNE
BET IT ALL ON BLONDE
THE LAS VEGAS RESIDENCY
AUGUST 25 - DECEMBER 16
HOUSE OF BLUES LAS VEGAS

VAN MORRISON
SEPTEMBER 6, 8 & 9
Bakkt THEATER
planet hollywood
VANMORRISON.COM


AN INTIMATE EVENING WITH
SANTANA
GREATEST HITS LIVE
HOUSE OF BLUES LAS VEGAS
SEPTEMBER 6-17 & NOVEMBER 1-12


WELCOME
TESLA
THE LAS VEGAS RESIDENCY
SEPTEMBER 29 - OCTOBER 7
HOUSE OF BLUES LAS VEGAS

SiriusXM PRESENTS
BILLY IDOL
LIVE IN LAS VEAGS
OCTOBER 20, 21, 25, 27 & 28
THE COSMOPOLITAN OF LAS VEGAS

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NOVEMBER 10 – 22
THE COLOSSEUM
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charts

DATA FOR WEEK OF 5.13.2023

Gomez (left) and Rema

Rema And Selena Gomez Make Historic Moves

BILLBOARD HOT 100

5

"Calm Down"
Rema & Selena Gomez

LAST WEEK	PEAK POSITION	WEEKS ON CHART
6	5	35

REMA AND SELENA GOMEZ'S "Calm Down" rises to a new No. 5 high on the Billboard Hot 100 (dated May 13), marking multiple unprecedented chart feats.

The song ascends with 78.9 million in radio airplay audience (up 19%), 15.7 million official streams (up 1%) and 5,000 sold (up 3%) in the United States April 28-May 4, according to Luminate.

Rema released the original version of "Calm Down" in February 2022 as a single from his debut solo album, *Rave & Roses*. Its remix with Gomez arrived last August, and that version's official video premiered in September.

Rema hits the Hot 100's top five with his first entry on the chart. Gomez adds her fourth top five hit and first since "Lose You To Love Me" became her first No. 1 in November 2019.

"Calm Down" simultaneously tops the Billboard U.S. Afrobeats Songs chart for a 36th week, extending the longest run since the ranking began just over a year ago (in partnership with music festival and global brand Afro Nation). It's the first No. 1 on that ranking to also hit the Hot 100's top five.

The song concurrently crowns the Mainstream Top 40 chart, likewise becoming the first hit to have led both that list and U.S. Afrobeats Songs. "I think the magic behind this track lies in the combination of the fresh-sounding Afrobeats paired with the familiarity of Gomez," says Matt Mony, program director of Mainstream Top 40 reporter WYOY Jackson, Miss. With that approach, Mony believes, "records like this have huge potential in reaching a completely new audience."

—GARY TRUST

COURTESY OF REMA

Hot 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title PRODUCER (SONGWRITER)	Artist IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
②	①	①	**#1 for 5 WEEKS** **Last Night** J.MOI (J.BYRON,A.G.GORLEY,J.K.HINDLIN,CHARLIE HANDSOME)	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	1	14
①	2	2	**Kill Bill** R.BISEL,C.LANG (S.I.ROWE,R.BISEL,C.LANG)	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	1	21
3	3	3	**Flowers** KID HARPOON,T.JOHNSON (M.CYRUS,M.R.POLLACK,G.HEIN)	**Miley Cyrus** SMILEY MILEY/COLUMBIA	1	16
⑤	④	④	**Ella Baila Sola** P.J.TOVAR OCEGUERA JR.,E.RODRIGUEZ (P.J.TOVAR OCEGUERA JR.)	**Eslabon Armado X Peso Pluma** PRAJIN PARLAY/DEL	4	7
⑦	⑥	⑤	**Calm Down** LONDON,ANDRE VIBEZ (M.HUNTER,ANDRE VIBEZ,A.IBANEZ,S.GOMEZ)	**Rema & Selena Gomez** JONZING WORLD/MAVIN/SMG MUSIC/VIRGIN/INTERSCOPE	5	35
6	7	6	**Creepin'** METRO BOOMIN,DAHEALA (C.L.HAWKINS,E.SERMON,P.SMITH,M.C.JONES,E.N.BHRAONAIN,R.RYAN, N.RYAN,M.M.WINANS)	**Metro Boomin, The Weeknd & 21 Savage** BOOMINATI/REPUBLIC	3	22
⑮	⑤	7	**Un x100to** E.BARRERA,MAG (B.A.MARTINEZ OCASIO,M.D.BORRERO,E.I.BARRERA,A.J.CORREA)	**Grupo Frontera X Bad Bunny** RIMAS	5	3
8	8	8	**Die For You** THE WEEKND,CIRKUT,DOC MCKINNEY,CASHMERE CAT,PRINCE 85 (A.M.TESFAYE,M.MCKINNEY, PRINCE 85,DYLAN WIGGINS,M.A.HOIBERG,W.T.WALSH,H.R.WALTER,A.GRANDE)	**The Weeknd & Ariana Grande** XO/REPUBLIC	1	40
10	9	9	**Boy's A Liar, Pt. 2** MURA MASA,PINKPANTHERESS (MURA MASA,PINKPANTHERESS,I.GASTON)	**PinkPantheress & Ice Spice** PINKPANTHERESS/PARLOPHONE/ELEKTRA/3EE	3	13
11	10	10	**Anti-Hero** J.M.ANTONOFF,T.SWIFT (T.SWIFT,J.M.ANTONOFF)	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	1	28
⑭	⑬	⑪	**Favorite Song** ADELSO,T.MANAOIS (N.L.GRAINGER,A.SICAJU,T.MANAOIS)	**Toosii** SOUTHCOAST/CAPITOL	11	11
⑫	⑪	⑫	**La Bebe** HAZAKINGBEATZ (D.O.DONLUCAS MARTINEZ)	**Yng Lvcas x Peso Pluma** YNG LVCAS/WARNER LATINA	11	7
9	12	13	**Search & Rescue** BNYX,SAD PONY,W.CURTIS,40,LIL YACHTY (A.GRAHAM,N.J.SHEBIB,B.SAINT FORT,JESSE SAINT JOHN, W.CURTIS,J.RAISEN,LIL YACHTY)	**Drake** OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	2	4
⑲	⑭	⑭	**Fast Car** CHIP MATTHEWS,J.D.SINGLETON,L.COMBS (T.L.CHAPMAN)	**Luke Combs** RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/COLUMBIA	14	6
20	⑮	⑮	**Sure Thing** HAPPY PEREZ (M.J.PIMENTEL,N.PEREZ)	**Miguel** BYSTORM/BLACK ICE/JIVE/LEGACY/RCA	15	40
17	17	16	**Rock And A Hard Place** A.R.SHAWN (H.WARREN,J.HACKWORTH,J.HARVEY)	**Bailey Zimmerman** ELEKTRA/WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE/3EE/WEA	10	47
16	16	17	**Players** J.GOLDSTEIN (J.GOLDSTEIN,COI LERAY,A.C.KING,F.FERRARO,E.G.FLETCHER,S.ROBINSON,C.CHASE,M.GLOVER)	**Coi Leray** UPTOWN/REPUBLIC	9	18
18	19	18	**You Proof** J.MOI,CHARLIE HANDSOME (M.C.WALLEN,A.G.GORLEY,E.K.SMITH,CHARLIE HANDSOME)	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	5	51
㊿	㊶	⑲	**SAL/STM** **Cupid** A.VON MENTZER,L.UDIN,M.FELLANDER-TSAI (AHIN,A.VON MENTZER,KEENA,L.UDIN, M.FELLANDER-TSAI,SIAHN)	**Fifty Fifty** ATTRAKT/WARNER MUSIC KOREA/WARNER	19	7
21	20	20	**As It Was** KID HARPOON,T.JOHNSON (H.STYLES,T.E.P.HULL,T.JOHNSON)	**Harry Styles** ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	1	57

Go to the Chart Beat section of billboard.com for complete charts coverage.

The 25-year-old Douglasville, Ga., native's first Hot 100 entry also reaches No. 10 on the Country Airplay chart.

DAVID McCLISTER

HOT 100

53

"Tennessee Orange"
Megan Moroney

What has surprised you about the longevity of "Tennessee Orange"?
A lot of people in the beginning were like, "This is only going to be a football song, and people are only listening to it because it's football season." Since then, it's still streaming like crazy and getting played on the radio. I don't think some people were expecting it to outlive football season, but most people don't look at it as a football song — they look at it as a love song.

How have fans interacted with the song since its release in September?
When it came out, I was on tour with Jamey Johnson. For the first two weeks, I didn't play it because I thought nobody would know it. Now, that's the loudest song everyone sings every night. The crowds keep getting larger and louder, and "Tennessee Orange" is always one of my favorites in the set. [But] my personal favorite is when girls come up to me and tell me that my music made them break up with their boyfriends — that the confidence in the songs made them realize their worth. That has happened a few times. Let's face it: These girls that are dating bad men need to leave them.

In addition to your recent debut album, *Lucky*, that arrived May 5, you're currently opening for Brooks & Dunn and headlining shows in the fall. What's next for you?
The fact that I get to go on tour with them and hear them sing every night is surreal — I can't wait to bring my dad out to the show and have him watch, too. I'd like to keep selling out shows: The rooms keep getting bigger, and my fall tour, The Lucky Tour, is nearly sold out. I hope to collaborate with other artists on music, too.

—JESSICA NICHOLSON

HOT 100 FIRST-TIMERS

Artists who have recently made their initial appearances on the chart

ARTIST	SONG	DEBUT POSITION	DEBUT DATE
David Kushner	"Daylight"	48	4/29
Grupo Marca Registrada	"Di Que Si" with Grupo Frontera	99	4/29
Libianca	"People"	91	5/13

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD HOT 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR CURRENT SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA BY ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND SALES DATA AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2023 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

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JEFF BARNES

We are honored to induct Jeff Barnes, president of Record Plant Recording Studios, into The Los Angeles Film School Spotlight Academy.

LEARN MORE: www.lafilm.edu/spotlight

Important information about the educational debt, earnings, and completion rates of students who attended this school can be found at: lafilm.edu

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BILLBOARD 200

4

SZA
SOS

As *SOS* rules Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums for an 18th week, it breaks Aretha Franklin's record for the longest-leading No. 1 by a woman (set by *Aretha Now* in 1968, with 17 weeks).

8

Jack Harlow
Jackman.

Harlow scores his first No. 1 on Top Rap Albums as *Jackman.* jumps in with nearly 36,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending May 4, according to Luminate.

28

DAVE'S
GRATEFUL DEAD
VOLUME 46
PICKS
HOLLYWOOD PALLADIUM, LOS ANGELES, CA • 8/6/72

Grateful Dead
Dave's Picks Volume 46

The latest in the Grateful Dead's long-running archival concert series marks the band's 56th top 40-charting release, bringing it closer to the record of 58, shared by Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra.

1

Morgan Wallen
One Thing at a Time

MORGAN WALLEN
ONE THING AT A TIME

Morgan Wallen's *One Thing at a Time* continues its run atop the Billboard 200 as it leads for a ninth straight week (138,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States in the week ending May 4, according to Luminate). The last title to do so at No. 1 was Wallen's last release, *Dangerous: The Double Album*, which held the top slot for its first 10 weeks on the charts dated Jan. 23 through March 27, 2021. If *One Thing at a Time* hits a 10th week at No. 1, he'll become just the third male artist with at least two albums each with 10 or more weeks at No. 1, following Henry Mancini and Elvis Presley.

Meanwhile, the new album's "Last Night" hits No. 1 on Country Airplay, becoming the first song ever to simultaneously top that chart and the Billboard Hot 100.

—KEITH CAULFIELD

Billboard 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist IMPRINT/DISTRIBUTING LABEL	Title	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
1	1	1	**#1 for 9 WEEKS** **Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	**One Thing At A Time**	1	9
HOT SHOT DEBUT		②	**SEVENTEEN** PLEDIS/GEFFEN/IGA	**10th Mini Album: FML (EP)**	2	1
4	④	3	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	**Midnights**	1	28
3	6	4	**SZA** TOP DAWG/RCA	**SOS**	1	21
5	7	5	**Morgan Wallen** BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	**Dangerous: The Double Album**	1	121
NEW		⑥	**Eslabon Armado** DEL	**Desvelado**	6	1
6	8	7	**Luke Combs** RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	**Gettin' Old**	4	6
NEW		⑧	**Jack Harlow** GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG	**Jackman.**	8	1
7	9	9	**Metro Boomin** BOOMINATI/REPUBLIC	**Heroes & Villains**	1	22
9	⑩	10	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	**Lover**	1	193
8	11	11	**Bad Bunny** RIMAS	**Un Verano Sin Ti**	1	52
-	⑤	12	**YoungBoy Never Broke Again** NEVER BROKE AGAIN/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	**Don't Try This At Home**	5	2
-	②	13	**Agust D** BIGHIT MUSIC/GEFFEN/IGA	**D-Day**	2	2
NEW		⑭	**The National** 4AD	**First Two Pages Of Frankenstein**	14	1
13	17	⑮	**Karol G** UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO/UMLE	**Manana Sera Bonito**	1	10
14	⑫	16	**Taylor Swift** REPUBLIC	**Folklore**	1	145
11	15	17	**Drake & 21 Savage** OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	**Her Loss**	1	26
49	⑯	18	**The Weeknd** XO/REPUBLIC	**The Highlights**	2	116
16	18	⑲	**Zach Bryan** BELTING BRONCO/WARNER	**American Heartbreak**	5	50
23	㉑	20	**Taylor Swift** BIG MACHINE/BMLG	**1989**	1	438

SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD 200: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2023 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

UJA ENTERTAINMENT, TECH & LIFESTYLE

2023 MUSIC VISIONARY OF THE YEAR

STEVE BOOM

Vice President Audio, Twitch & Games, Amazon

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7 | 11:30 AM
ZIEGFELD BALLROOM | NEW YORK CITY

RESERVATIONS AND JOURNAL ADS

UJA Federation NEW YORK

Clockwise from top left: Sio, Saena, Aran and Keena of Fifty Fifty.

ATTRAKT CREATIVE CONTENT GROUP

GLOBAL 200

5

“Cupid”
Fifty Fifty

SOUTH KOREA’S FIFTY FIFTY reaches the Billboard Global 200’s top five for the first time with its breakthrough hit, “Cupid.” The song shoots 8-5, bounding by 38% to 77.7 million streams and 54% to 4,000 downloads sold worldwide April 28-May 4, according to Luminate.

The quartet — Aran, Keena, Saena and Sio — becomes the third K-pop group to have hit the Global 200’s top five, joining BTS (eight top five hits) and Blackpink (three).

Meanwhile, “Cupid” sparks history on the Official U.K. Singles chart: It surges 18-9, making Fifty Fifty the first all-women K-pop group to have hit the top 10.

On the Billboard Hot 100, “Cupid” flies 41-19, with top Streaming and Sales Gainer honors. It vaults 26-10 on Streaming Songs (16.1 million U.S. streams, up 41%) and enters Digital Song Sales at No. 38 (2,000 sold, up 73%). It also drew 1.1 million in radio audience (up 211%).

Fifty Fifty was formed in 2022 by South Korean entertainment agency ATTRAKT, which, as announced in April, is now partnering with Warner Records/Warner Music Group Korea to promote the group.

Atop the Global 200, Grupo Frontera and Bad Bunny’s “Un x100to” notches a second week at No. 1, with 99.5 million streams (down 10%) and 3,000 sold (down 28%) globally. Eslabon Armado and Peso Pluma’s “Ella Baila Sola” holds at No. 2, two weeks after it hit No. 1, and Yng Lvcas and Peso Pluma’s “La Bebe” remains at its No. 3 best. Thanks to those tracks, regional Mexican, and Spanish-language, songs place at Nos. 1, 2 and 3 simultaneously for a second straight week, a feat that had not previously been achieved, dating to the chart’s inception in September 2020.

—GARY TRUST

Global 200

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Title	Artist	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
5	1	1	#1 for 2 WEEKS **Un x100to**	**Grupo Frontera X Bad Bunny**	1	3
1	2	2	**Ella Baila Sola**	**Eslabon Armado X Peso Pluma**	1	7
3	3	3	**La Bebe**	**Yng Lvcas x Peso Pluma**	3	10
2	4	4	**Flowers**	**Miley Cyrus**	1	16
9	8	5	GG **Cupid**	**Fifty Fifty**	5	8
4	5	6	**Kill Bill**	**SZA**	1	21
7	7	7	**Calm Down**	**Rema & Selena Gomez**	3	44
6	6	8	**Die For You**	**The Weeknd & Ariana Grande**	2	61
14	10	9	**Idol**	**YOASOBI**	9	3
8	9	10	**Last Night**	**Morgan Wallen**	5	14
12	11	11	**Daylight**	**David Kushner**	11	3
10	13	12	**TQG**	**Karol G x Shakira**	1	10
19	14	13	**As It Was**	**Harry Styles**	1	57
24	16	14	**Por Las Noches**	**Peso Pluma**	14	10
22	21	15	**PRC**	**Peso Pluma X Natanael Cano**	15	14
18	20	16	**Anti-Hero**	**Taylor Swift**	1	28
20	19	17	**Creepin’**	**Metro Boomin, The Weeknd & 21 Savage**	3	22
15	18	18	**Boy’s A Liar, Pt. 2**	**PinkPantheress & Ice Spice**	3	13
26	25	19	**I’m Good (Blue)**	**David Guetta & Bebe Rexha**	2	36
27	24	20	**AMG**	**Gabito Ballesteros, Peso Pluma & Natanael Cano**	20	17

STREAMING AND SALES DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

BILLBOARD GLOBAL 200: THE WEEK’S MOST POPULAR SONGS BASED ON STREAMING AND SALES ACTIVITY FROM OVER 200 TERRITORIES AROUND THE WORLD — INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES — AS TRACKED BY LUMINATE. THE RANKING IS BASED ON A WEIGHTED FORMULA INCORPORATING OFFICIAL-ONLY STREAMS ON BOTH SUBSCRIPTION AND AD-SUPPORTED TIERS OF LEADING AUDIO AND VIDEO MUSIC SERVICES, PLUS DOWNLOAD SALES FROM TOP MUSIC RETAILERS ACROSS THE GLOBE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2023 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

CONGRATULATIONS

GILBERT PAZ

VP, LIVE ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS OPERATIONS

billboard 40 40

2023 TOP YOUNG EXECUTIVE

Loud And Live MOVE CONCERTS

ARTIST 100

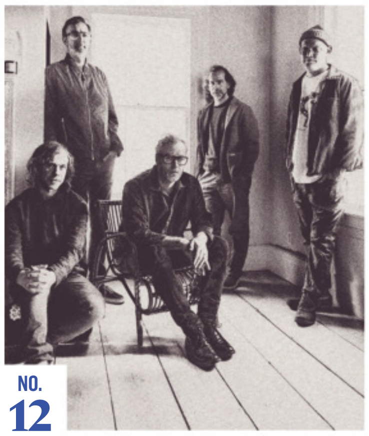
1

SEVENTEEN

WEEKS ON CHART

23

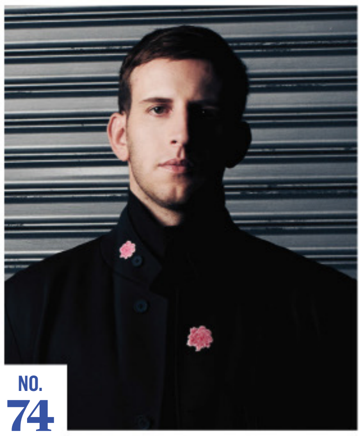
Seventeen notches its highest-charting album, and third top 10, on the Billboard 200 as its *10th Mini Album: FML* debuts at No. 2. The set starts with 135,000 equivalent album units earned in the United States April 28-May 4, according to Luminate. It also launches at No. 1 on Top Album Sales (132,000 sold). —KEITH CAULFIELD



NO. 12

A Monstrous Debut

The National (above) rules the Top Rock & Alternative Albums chart for a fifth total — and consecutive — time with its new set, *First Two Pages of Frankenstein*. The Matt Berninger-fronted band's streak dates to May 2010's *High Violet*. *Frankenstein* debuts with 32,000 equivalent album units earned in its first week, including 24,000 album sales. The set also debuts atop Vinyl Albums (with 15,000 format copies), the group's fourth No. 1 on the chart. Concurrently, the album's "The Alcott" (featuring Taylor Swift) enters Hot Rock & Alternative Songs at No. 13, thanks to 2.9 million official U.S. streams and 4,000 sold. —KEVIN RUTHERFORD



NO. 74

Illenium's Third No. 1

Illenium debuts at No. 1 on the Top Dance/Electronic Albums chart with his self-titled set. *Illenium* begins with 17,000 equivalent album units earned, including 7,000 from album sales. The Illinois native adds his third No. 1, following *Fallen Embers* (for one week in 2021) and *Ascend* (eight weeks, 2019). All six of his chart entries have hit the top 10, a history that also includes *Ascend (Remixes)* (No. 5, 2020), *Awake* (No. 3, 2017) and *Ashes* (No. 6, 2016). On the multimetric Hot Dance/Electronic Songs chart, *Illenium*'s "Eyes Wide Shut" (with Avril Lavigne and Travis Barker) debuts at No. 9. —GORDON MURRAY

Artist 100

2 WKS. AGO	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	Artist	IMPRINT/LABEL	PEAK POS.	WKS. ON CHART
RE-ENTRY		①	**#1 for 1 WEEK** **SEVENTEEN**	PLEDIS/GEFFEN/IGA	1	23
1	2	2	**Morgan Wallen**	BIG LOUD/REPUBLIC	1	217
3	①	3	**Taylor Swift**	REPUBLIC	1	458
5	4	4	**Luke Combs**	RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	1	322
4	5	5	**SZA**	TOP DAWG/RCA	1	192
7	7	6	**Drake**	OVO SOUND/REPUBLIC	1	462
8	6	7	**The Weeknd**	XO/REPUBLICY	1	408
11	8	8	**Peso Pluma**	PRAJIN PARLAY/PRAJIN	8	8
10	9	9	**Miley Cyrus**	SMILEY MILEY/COLUMBIA	3	132
14	11	10	**Ed Sheeran**	ATLANTIC/AG	1	455
RE-ENTRY		⑪	**Jack Harlow**	GENERATION NOW/ATLANTIC/AG	1	131
RE-ENTRY		⑫	**The National**	4AD	4	4
-	③	13	**Agust D**	BIGHIT MUSIC/GEFFEN/IGA	3	3
NEW		⑭	**Gordon Lightfoot**	UNITED ARTISTS/CAPITOL/REPRISE/UME/RHINO	14	1
2	10	15	**Metallica**	BLACKENED	2	389
-	(75)	⑯	**Grateful Dead**	GRATEFUL DEAD/RHINO	3	42
12	12	17	**Post Malone**	MERCURY/REPUBLIC	1	358
16	13	18	**Lil Baby**	4PF/WOLFPACK GLOBAL/QUALITY CONTROL/MOTOWN/CAPITOL	1	260
15	15	19	**Harry Styles**	ERSKINE/COLUMBIA	1	201
17	16	20	**Kendrick Lamar**	PGLANG/TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE/IGA	1	383

SEVENTEEN: COURTESY OF PLEDIS ENTERTAINMENT. ILLENIUM: LINDSEY BYRNES. NATIONAL: JOSH GOLEMAN.

BILLBOARD ARTIST 100: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR ARTISTS ACROSS ALL GENRES, RANKED BY ALBUM AND TRACK SALES AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE, RADIO AIRPLAY AUDIENCE IMPRESSIONS AS MEASURED BY LUMINATE AND STREAMING ACTIVITY DATA FROM ONLINE MUSIC SOURCES TRACKED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2023 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

AIRPLAY, SALES AND STREAMING DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

CONGRATULATIONS

Marissa Putney

VP, INTERNATIONAL LABEL MANAGEMENT

BILLBOARD

40 UNDER 40

The Orchard

NO. 1

Desvelado's Record Debut

Eslabon Armado (above) makes history with the No. 1 debut of *Desvelado* on the Top Latin Albums chart. With 44,000 equivalent album units earned in its opening week, according to Luminate, the set scores the largest week for a regional Mexican album since the chart started measuring titles by units in February 2017. The project's 16 tracks drew 63.5 million U.S. streams — the most in a week ever for a regional Mexican album.

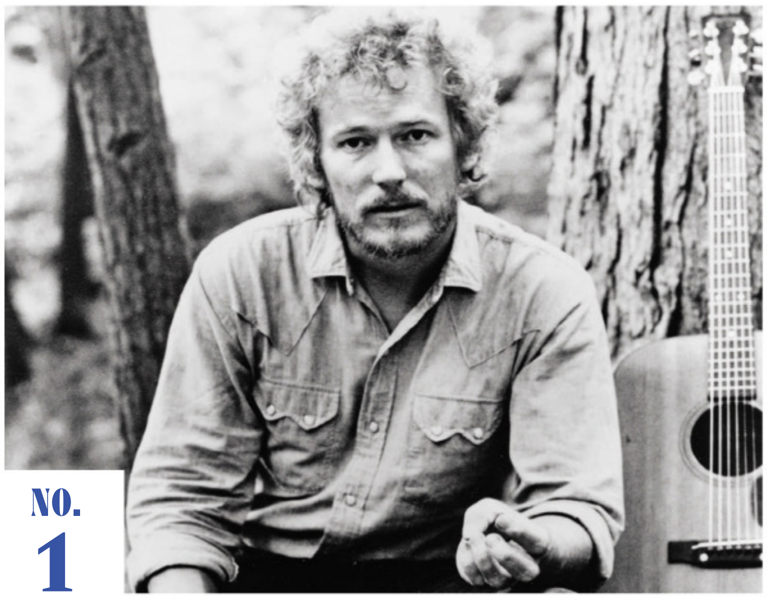
On the all-genre Billboard 200, *Desvelado* opens at No. 6, the highest rank ever for a regional Mexican album, surpassing the group's own No. 9-peaking *Nostalgia* in May 2022.

Concurrently, *Desvelado*'s "Ella Baila Sola" (with Peso Pluma) reaches No. 1 on the Streaming Songs chart with 34.6 million official U.S. streams, up 2%. It's the first regional Mexican song to lead the list and the first No. 1 on the chart for both acts.

—PAMELA BUSTIOS AND KEVIN RUTHERFORD

Top Latin Albums

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	**Artist** IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	**Title**	WKS. ON CHART
HOT SHOT DEBUT	1	**#1 for 1 WEEK** **Eslabon Armado** DEL	**Desvelado**	1
1	2	**Bad Bunny** RIMAS	**Un Verano Sin Ti**	52
2	3	**GG** **Karol G** UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO/UMLE	**Manana Sera Bonito**	10
3	4	**Yng Lvcas** YNG LVCAS	**LPM (La Perreo Mixtape)**	6
4	5	**Fuerza Regida** STREET MOB/RANCHO HUMILDE/SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Pa Que Hablen.: I.**	18
5	6	**Bad Bunny** RIMAS	**YHLQMDLG**	166
6	7	**Rauw Alejandro** DUARS/SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Saturno**	25
7	8	**Ivan Cornejo** MANZANA	**Danado**	48
8	9	**Fuerza Regida** STREET MOB/RANCHO HUMILDE/SONY MUSIC LATIN	**Sigan Hablando.: II.**	18
9	10	**Eladio Carrion** RIMAS	**3MEN2 KBRN**	7



NO. 1

Gordon Lightfoot Remembered

Four classics from the 1970s by Lightfoot, who died May 1 at age 84, enter the Digital Song Sales chart's top 10, led by "If You Could Read My Mind" at No. 1. The song sold 10,000 downloads (up from a nominal sum) in the United States in the week ending May 4, according to Luminate. Lightfoot ranks atop a *Billboard* chart for the first time in 48 years, when "Carefree Highway" ruled Adult Contemporary in May 1975. Also new to the Digital Song Sales top 10: "Sundown" (No. 3; 9,000), "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" (No. 5; 7,000) and "Carefree Highway" (No. 10; 4,000).

Paced by the Lightfoot retrospective *Gord's Gold* (3,000 sold), his U.S. album sales in the tracking week vaulted 906% to 6,000. His digital song sales soared 3,637% to 41,000, and his official on-demand U.S. streams jumped 290% to 14 million.

—GARY TRUST

Digital Song Sales

LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	**Title** IMPRINT/PROMOTION LABEL	**Artist**	WKS. ON CHART
NEW	1	**#1 for 1 WEEK** **If You Could Read My Mind** REPRISE/RHINO	**Gordon Lightfoot**	1
4	2	**Last Night** BIG LOUD/MERCURY/REPUBLIC	**Morgan Wallen**	14
NEW	3	**Sundown** REPRISE/RHINO	**Gordon Lightfoot**	1
NEW	4	**Dirty Money** TOM MACDONALD	**Tom MacDonald**	1
NEW	5	**The Wreck Of The Edmund Fitzgerald** REPRISE/RHINO	**Gordon Lightfoot**	1
5	6	**Fast Car** RIVER HOUSE/COLUMBIA NASHVILLE/SMN	**Luke Combs**	6
6	7	**Flowers** SMILEY MILEY/COLUMBIA	**Miley Cyrus**	17
9	8	**Calm Down** JONZING WORLD/SMG MUSIC/INTERSCOPE/MAVIN/IGA	**Rema & Selena Gomez**	21
11	9	**In The End** WARNER	**Linkin Park**	11
NEW	10	**Carefree Highway** REPRISE/RHINO	**Gordon Lightfoot**	1

ESLABON: DEL STUDIOS. LIGHTFOOT: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES.

SALES AND AIRPLAY DATA COMPILED BY LUMINATE

TOP LATIN ALBUMS: THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR LATIN ALBUMS, BASED ON MULTIMETRIC CONSUMPTION, BLENDING TRADITIONAL ALBUM SALES, STREAMING-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS AND TRACK-EQUIVALENT ALBUMS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. DIGITAL SONG SALES: THE WEEK'S TOP DOWNLOADED SONGS, AS COMPILED BY LUMINATE. SEE CHARTS LEGEND ON BILLBOARD.COM FOR COMPLETE RULES AND EXPLANATIONS. © 2023 BILLBOARD MEDIA LLC AND LUMINATE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

RANCHO HUMILDE

José Becerra "JB"

Co-Founder of **Rancho Humilde**

RANCHO HUMILDE
Congratulates our co-founder **José Becerra "JB"** for his inclusion in ***Billboard's*** prestigious ***2023 40 Under 40 list***.

JB has been part of this dream for more than 15 years, positioning Mexican music as one of the most important genres globally. Your work and dedication have been fundamental in the development and growth of all of our artists, and that's why we celebrate this recognition and all of those that you will receive in the future.

We are just getting started!

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40 UNDER 40
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SM
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GROUP

market

PG. 22 WHAT'S UP AT AMRA
PG. 24 PUBLISHERS QUARTERLY
PG. 28 STREAMING'S FRAUD FIGHTERS

MUSIC AND MONEY

Bespoke Beats

"Dynamic music" promises to soundtrack life on demand — and in real time

BY KRISTIN ROBINSON // ILLUSTRATION BY REBEKKA DUNLAP

"HOW MAGICAL WOULD it be if we listened to music and music listened back to us?" asks Philip Sheppard, the co-founder/CEO of Lifescore, a U.K. startup that creates soundtracks tailored to users' functional needs, from sleep to focus to fitness.

Though the premise sounds like science fiction, a number of new companies are already working with technology that attunes music to listeners' movements in video games, workouts, virtual reality — even the aesthetics of their Snapchat lenses. Much as a film composer accentuates pivotal moments in the story with perfectly timed swells and crescendos, these innovations are being used to create bespoke soundtracks in real time.

One of the most fertile testing grounds for "dynamic" or "personalized" music, as it is called, is the gaming sector. Gamers tend to be avid music fans who stream songs an average of 7.6 hours a week — more than double the rate of the average consumer, according to MIDiA Research — and for some time now, game developers have linked players' in-game movements to changes in lighting, setting and other parameters to enhance their storytelling.

David Knox, president of Reactional Music, the maker of an interactive music engine for video games, says "the final frontier for innovation in gaming is music." Until recently, video-game music has consisted of loop-based scores or licensed tracks. Because of its repetitiveness, Knox says many users mute game soundtracks in favor of Spotify or Apple Music.

To compete with this, Knox says Reactional's "rules-based music engine" applies the same reactive technology used in gaming graphics to the soundtrack, enabling, for example, a player in a first-person-shooter game to fire a gun in time with the beat of a song. As the technology evolves, Knox says soundtracks could transform to reflect the state of a player's health or the level of danger.

This same technology could work with augmented reality and the so-called metaverse. Minibeats, a company that creates social media lenses with interactive musical elements, is in the process of incorporating dynamic music technology, which it calls "musical cameras," into its AR filters for Snapchat. For one of its first launches, Minibeats partnered with Rhino and Stax Records in February to promote the 30th anniversary of the release of Booker T. & The M.G.'s' "Green Onions." One Minibeats filter turns users' heads into green onions and allows them to control when the song's signature Hammond organ riff courses through body and facial movements. Anoth-

Two new bills to clean up the ticketing industry were introduced in the Senate.

ByteDance shut down the free tier of its **Resso** streaming platform.

Madison Square Garden Entertainment announced plans to sell its **Tao Group** stake to **Mohari Hospitality** for $300 million.

BMG combined its new-release and catalog recordings businesses, claiming a major music company first.

er filter morphs users' faces into spinning vinyl records, allowing them to control when the song's guitar and keys start and stop by opening and closing their mouths.

When imagining the future of dynamic music, Mike Butera, the company's founder and CEO, says Disney's *Fantasia* comes to mind. The ambitious 1940 film, which mixes animation and live action and features Mickey Mouse in his iconic sorcerer's hat, syncs vibrantly colored dream-like visuals with a score that enhances what's transpiring onscreen. "Imagine if we transformed your day-to-day life into something like that?" Butera says. "The mundanity of drinking coffee, walking the dog and driving to work [turned] into something [that] can be soundtracked with your own personal score that you control, whether that's through a phone camera or AR glasses."

These startups all claim that they have received only glowing feedback from the music business so far, and many have formed key partnerships. Hipgnosis recently announced a deal with Reactional Music to help bring its catalog of hit songs to the startup. Bentley and Audi have made deals with Lifescore to get dynamic soundtracks into cars, and Warner Music Group counts itself as an investor as well. Minibeats says it's "in discussion with all the major labels," though beyond its Rhino-Stax partnership, the company declined to disclose more details.

$97B

Dollars spent on in-game customizations in 2020, according to MIDiA Research. Creators of dynamic music technology see this sector as a financial opportunity.

These emerging capabilities are typically powered by artificial intelligence to adapt recorded music to malleable experiences, but unlike other AI companies trying to create machine-made music with the touch of a button, these dynamic music startups either license preexisting, human-made songs or commission composers to create new or more dynamic compositions.

Lifescore pays composers to record a number of separate elements of a song, known as "stems," and then, Sheppard says, its technology works with the resulting audio files like "shuffling a deck of cards," assembling newfound arrangements in configurations intended to support a user's need for focus while studying or working, for example, or sleep.

In the case of preexisting tracks, companies like Minibeats partner with Audioshake, a firm that uses AI to break down songs into individual, standardized stems, so that they can easily manipulate a song's instrumental mix — guitar, drums, vocals, etc. — in real time. Audioshake's proprietary technology is especially helpful in the case of older recordings in which the copyright owner no longer has the stems.

Audioshake founder/CEO Jessica Powell says one reason she thinks the music industry has embraced this innovation is its potential to spur music discovery. "I think the same way TikTok pushes new songs, gaming — as well as other use cases — have enormous potential to introduce people to music," whether that be a catalog track or a new release.

Though this technology is new, interactivity has been long seen as a way to create powerful bonds between fans and songs. Powell points to popular video games like *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* as successful examples. Karaoke is another. One could even point to the more recent novelty of stem players, like those Ye peddled during the release of his album *Donda 2*, as a way of engaging listeners. At a time when much of music discovery is passive — scrolling TikTok, streaming an editorial playlist or turning on the radio — musical interactivity and now personalization promises a stronger bond.

Knox at Reactional says interactive music also has economic potential. In-game purchases — which allow players to buy customizable elements like cars, weapons and outfits — dwarfed global recorded-music revenue in 2020, with players spending $97 billion in-game compared with music's $35.9 billion (retail values), according to MIDiA Research. "In the same way you put hooks into a game, allowing someone to pay to change their appearance at a certain point, a game developer working with us could create a hook that unlocks access to the Reactional platform, letting players buy their favorite songs," he says.

Since at least the advent of the transistor radio, consumers have used music to soundtrack their lives, but until recently, personalization of those soundtracks was limited to song selection and playlist curation. The songs themselves were unchangeable. Those on the forefront of dynamic music contend that it marries recorded music with the goose bumps-inducing, real-time experience of listening to something live.

"You know how you listen to a live performance, and the musicians are influenced by your energy in the room?" asks Erin Corsi, director of communications for Lifescore. "That's what this is. Though this also feels like something new, it feels like we are finally able to get back to how music started."

Dynamic Doers

Four companies working on the forefront of personalized music

▶ Audioshake
This San Francisco-based AI company founded by CEO Jessica Powell breaks down music into its fundamental elements, known as "stems." The technology is crucial for companies creating dynamic-music experiences and other production that involves extensive rearranging and remixing, such as synch placements and remastering back-catalog songs where the original stems are no longer available. Already partnered with Warner Chappell Music, LVRN, Primary Wave, Crush Music, Downtown, Reservoir, CD Baby and many more, Audioshake is quickly becoming a go-to industry partner.

▶ Lifescore
Lifescore co-founder/CEO Philip Sheppard envisions a world where music conforms to an individual's actions in real time, whether that's hiking in a national park or studying for finals week. To do so, the U.K.-based Lifescore team commissions composers of all genres to create individual tracks that are recorded at Abbey Road Studios in London, then fed through a proprietary algorithm that enables the music to be shuffled into near-infinite arrangements that support various tasks and functions common to everyday life.

▶ Minibeats
A spinoff of Nashville-based music technology company Artiphon, Minibeats develops song-focused social media lenses and filters dubbed "musical cameras" that enable users to alter a music mix through facial and body movements. Founder/CEO Mike Butera says he intends to evolve the technology to the point where "the mundanity of drinking coffee, walking the dog and driving to work ... can be soundtracked with your own personal score."

▶ Reactional Music
This Stockholm-based startup is working to revolutionize what co-founder/president David Knox calls the "last frontier" of gaming technology." Video-game soundtracks are typically static music loops. Reactional applies the same "rule-based" technology used with gaming visuals to the musical score so that it accentuates the action taking place onscreen. The tech has the economic potential to be sold in-game as customizable music.

—K.R.

MICHAEL LEWAN

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An AI-generated **Drake** and **The Weeknd** song was pulled from streaming services after going viral.

Anitta signed with **Republic Records** just weeks after departing her deal with **Warner Music Group**.

KOBALT'S UNPOLISHED GEM

AMRA, Kobalt's global digital collections society, says it can disrupt a century-old sector of the industry

IS THERE ANOTHER $1 billion in global publishing royalties that rights holders can gain by using better technology? That's what Kobalt CEO Laurent Hubert says.

When Kobalt was bought by Francisco Partners last September, the disruptive innovator known for its publishing administration clients like Karol G, Phoebe Bridgers and Max Martin said that a primary goal of this next chapter would be growing its little known and even less understood global digital rights collections society for compositions, the American Music Rights Association.

In the months since, Kobalt and its new owners have refined their strategy for scaling this "unpolished gem," as Francisco Partners and Kobalt board director Matt Spetzler calls AMRA. Their first hurdle? Explaining what exactly the global mechanical and performance rights society focused on collecting digital-specific income can accomplish. "Too few people know what AMRA does," says Hubert.

In an industry where, according to CISAC's 2021 annual report, over 36% of global music publishing revenue royalties come from digital sources — a figure AMRA says will grow to 80% within five years — Kobalt believes AMRA can better leverage its technology and its direct agreements with digital service providers to streamline digital royalty collection across 212 countries, cutting out the friction or delays of a traditional performing rights organization (PRO). Their biggest licensees include some of the largest DSPs, like Spotify and Apple Music, but they are also working with promising new brands like China-based TikTok rival Kuaishou and others.

$1B

Amount Kobalt says can be gained from reducing "leakage" in digital royalties

AMRA says it is a one-of-a-kind service, providing clients faster turnarounds for royalty collection (in six to nine months), more precise accounting for digital royalties and audit rights, and greater transparency that its executives say make AMRA clients and the wider industry a lot more money.

How much? AMRA CEO Tomas Ericsson estimates that clients can gain "as much as 30%" more royalties in certain regions. Hubert contends that if his company can reduce the percentage of money that leaks from the $8 billion to $9 billion of royalties collected by the global music industry on the publishing side, excluding writer's share — "leakage" that stems from high intermediary costs, poor matching, undercollection and underlicensing — AMRA and other players in the industry could grow the pie by another $1 billion for collection and distribution. AMRA could be a tool to help accomplish that, Hubert says.

Ericsson explains that AMRA can go to streaming services and "offer the entire catalog for Kobalt music publishing and an additional three publishers and an additional 180 writers to these streaming services, and we can give them those rights globally under one license. [The streaming services] report to us directly, and they pay us directly.

"In doing so, we can avoid a lot of noise, high fees, inefficiencies, poor technology and local issues," Ericsson says.

Since its acquisition by Kobalt in 2015, AMRA has distributed almost $500 million in digital royalties on behalf of songwriters and rights holders. Managed as a separate entity under the Kobalt umbrella, AMRA generated $117.3 million in revenue in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022, and the company currently expects AMRA will generate $150 million in revenue during this fiscal year. Hubert declines to provide specific financial targets but says he expects double-digit revenue growth this year from AMRA, and that its growth rate will substantially exceed Kobalt's.

Apart from its DSP licensees, AMRA works with songwriters such as Julia Michaels, Lindsey Buckingham, Sam Hollander and independent publishers like Sundae Music Publishing, Anthem and Spirit. It's also partnering with functional or mood-music companies, such as Strange Fruits, Vanity Snare Music, Lullify Music and Acrylic Records, whose music is popular on passive-listening playlists. Kobalt remains AMRA's largest licensee, Ericsson says.

Kobalt, AMRA and its new owners are aligned on their aim to massively scale AMRA. Those owners are Francisco Partners, a California-based private equity firm that favors tech-forward music companies; MUSIC, the firm of music industry veteran and investor Matt Pincus; and Dundee Partners, the quietly influential family office of Stephen and Sam Hendel whose investments range from The Knitting Factory to the *Fela!* musical to music investing platform JKBX. Kobalt founder and chairman Willard Ahdritz and Hubert also have equity stakes in the company and have signed long-term contracts to remain in their roles.

Through interviews with all those stakeholders, AMRA's emerging growth strategy has three prongs. The first is to expand its list of publishing clients, looking for small, medium and large indie publishers.

At a faster and larger clip, AMRA also aims to exploit opportunities with other niche music genres in the Latin and African markets in a bid to replicate the success it had partnering with mood-music companies. It also aims to take on more clients on the "long-tail end of the business" — songwriters who may not be published or affiliated but have steady streaming income.

This last prong of the strategy reflects the influence of Francisco Partners. In the past two years or so, the firm has invested $2 billion in six music companies, five of which are geared toward music creators, ranging from audio production and DJ'ing software and hardware to a plugin platform with marketing, distribution and authorization services. Managed under the umbrella of SoundWide, Francisco Partners says these companies have a combined 7 million users.

"We have seen the marketplace has shifted and grown around the creator community," Hubert says. "We have the capabilities from a scaling and tech stack perspective to go after that market."

AMRA faces hurdles if it's to maintain formidable growth. Tracking digital royalties is challenging, given metadata errors and fast-growing use cases. The association is also held back when it comes to nondigital royalties, where existing laws and collection societies prevent it from operating as swiftly or accurately as it can with digital revenue. Songwriters in particular are the most restricted: They can use AMRA to collect their digital performance and mechanical royalties, as well as offline royalties, but the offline royalties still pass through a traditional PRO before reaching AMRA, meaning the writer will be charged two fees: one from the traditional organization, then a "significantly lower" fee from AMRA. Also, although AMRA collects in 212 countries, two of the world's most royalty-rich nations, China and the United States, are not part of their offering due to local laws.

Still, AMRA will bring all of its promised efficiencies to the digital side, which is what the company anticipates will far outweigh offline royalties soon. The company believes it to be uniquely positioned to collect those royalties. As it likes to say: "AMRA is a category of one."

—ELIZABETH DILTS MARSHALL AND KRISTIN ROBINSON

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM STRAW

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40 UNDER 40 HONOREES

ACTIVIST

Longtime *Billboard* editor and columnist **Irv Lichtman** died at age 87.

Live Nation CEO **Michael Rapino**'s total pay jumped to $139 million in 2022.

SONY SWEEPS THE FIRST QUARTER

SZA is the top songwriter; Miley's "Flowers" and The Weeknd's "Die for You" are top songs

BY ED CHRISTMAN

AFTER SHARING NO. 1 WITH UNIVERSAL MUSIC Publishing Group (UMPG) for three consecutive quarters, Sony Music Publishing swept *Billboard*'s Publishers Quarterly report for the first 90 days of 2023 — including the country music category. The Weeknd's "Die for You" and Miley Cyrus' "Flowers" were the No. 1 songs on the Top Radio Airplay and Hot 100 publishers rankings, respectively, while SZA took top songwriter honors.

Sony's 30.26% market share of the 100 Top Radio Airplay songs rose from 28.89% in the fourth quarter of 2022 and marked its eighth consecutive quarter in the No. 1 spot. The number of shares it held in songs on the ranking was also up quarter to quarter, from 64 to 66.

The Weeknd

The publisher also finished at No. 1 on the Hot 100 publishers ranking, putting an end to UMPG's remarkable three-consecutive-quarter streak at No. 1 with over 30% of the market — the first since that ranking was instituted in 2019. Sony returned to first place with a 30.56% share amassed from stakes in 67 songs, a huge gain over its No. 2 showing in the previous quarter, when it posted a 22.71% market share tied to shares in 58 tunes.

Sony also notched its third consecutive quarter as the No. 1 publisher on the Country Airplay list.

UMPG finished No. 2 on the Hot 100 ranking after its market share dropped from 31.63% to 23.45% quarter to quarter and its song count declined from 63 to 52. Compared with the previous year, however, UMPG's first-quarter performance was up more than three percentage points.

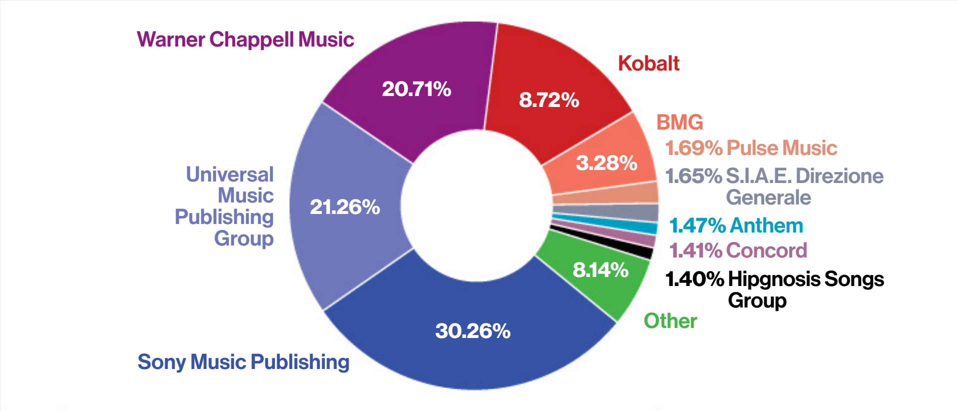
Although the publisher remained firmly in second place on the Top Radio Airplay ranking, its market share fell from 25.66% in the fourth quarter of 2022 to 21.26% in the first quarter. Its share of songs also declined, from 52 to 48.

Warner Chappell Music finished third on both rankings and showed improved performance on each. The publisher scored a 20.71% market share on Top Radio Airplay — up almost five percentage points from the previous quarter's 15.73% — and 21.73% on the Hot 100 ranking, up from 18.59% in the fourth quarter of 2022. Those gains came from shares in 52 and 47 songs, respectively.

The top songwriter across the board was Solána "SZA" Imani Rowe, who is published by UMPG. She co-wrote eight songs on the Hot 100 ranking and four on Top Radio Airplay. Her top song on both lists was "Kill Bill," which is No. 2 on the Hot 100 ranking and No. 6 on Top Radio Airplay. b

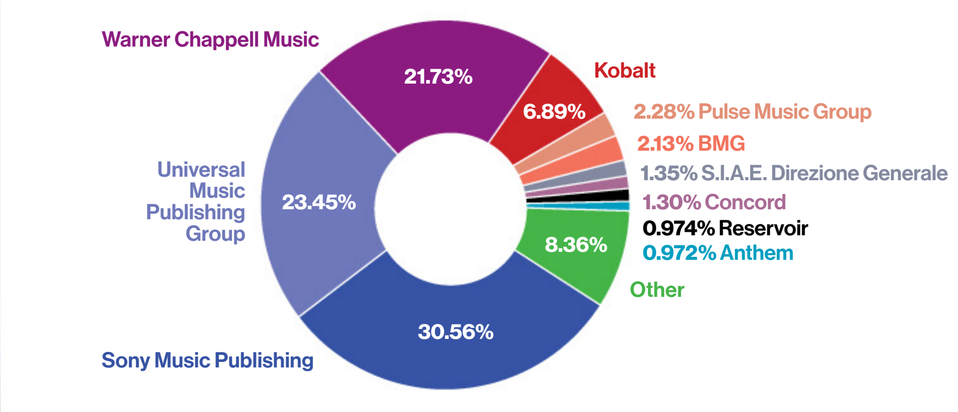
Cyrus

Top Radio Airplay: Publishers*



Rank	Title	Artist	Label
1	"Die for You"	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande	XO/Republic Records
2	"Creepin' "	Metro Boomin	Republic Records
3	"Flowers"	Miley Cyrus	Columbia
4	"I'm Good (Blue)"	David Guetta & Bebe Rexha	Warner Records
5	"Unholy"	Sam Smith & Kim Petras	Capitol Records
6	"Kill Bill"	SZA	RCA
7	"Anti-Hero"	Taylor Swift	Republic Records
8	"Under the Influence"	Chris Brown	RCA
9	"CUFF IT"	Beyoncé	Columbia
10	"Made You Look"	Meghan Trainor	Epic

Hot 100 Songs: Publishers*



Rank	Title	Artist	Label
1	"Flowers"	Miley Cyrus	Smiley Miley/Columbia
2	"Kill Bill"	SZA	Top Dawg/RCA
3	"Die for You"	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande	XO/Republic
4	"Creepin' "	Metro Boomin, The Weeknd & 21 Savage	Boominati/Republic
5	"Anti-Hero"	Taylor Swift	Republic
6	"Unholy"	Sam Smith & Kim Petras	Capitol
7	"Last Night"	Morgan Wallen	Big Loud/Mercury/Republic
8	"I'm Good (Blue)"	David Guetta & Bebe Rexha	What a DJ/Warner
9	"As It Was"	Harry Styles	Erskine/Columbia
10	"Rich Flex"	Drake & 21 Savage	OVO Sound/Republic

* For the Top 10 Publishers Top Radio Airplay chart, percentage calculations were based upon the overall top 100 detecting songs from 2,941 U.S. radio stations electronically monitored by Mediabase (and provided through Luminate) 24 hours a day, seven days a week during the period of Dec. 30, 2022, to March 30, 2023. For Top 10 Publishers Hot 100 Songs, percentage calculations were based upon the top 100 songs as ranked by Billboard Hot 100 points calculated from Luminate-compiled digital sales, streaming data and Mediabase-tracked radio airplay detections during the same period, reflecting the issue dates of Jan. 14 through April 8. Publisher information for musical works on both charts has been identified by the Harry Fox Agency. A "publisher" is defined as an administrator, copyright owner and/or controlling party.

WEEKND: FRAZER HARRISON/WIREIMAGE. CYRUS: EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES.

CONGRATULATIONS TOP Q1 PUBLISHERS

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HOT 100

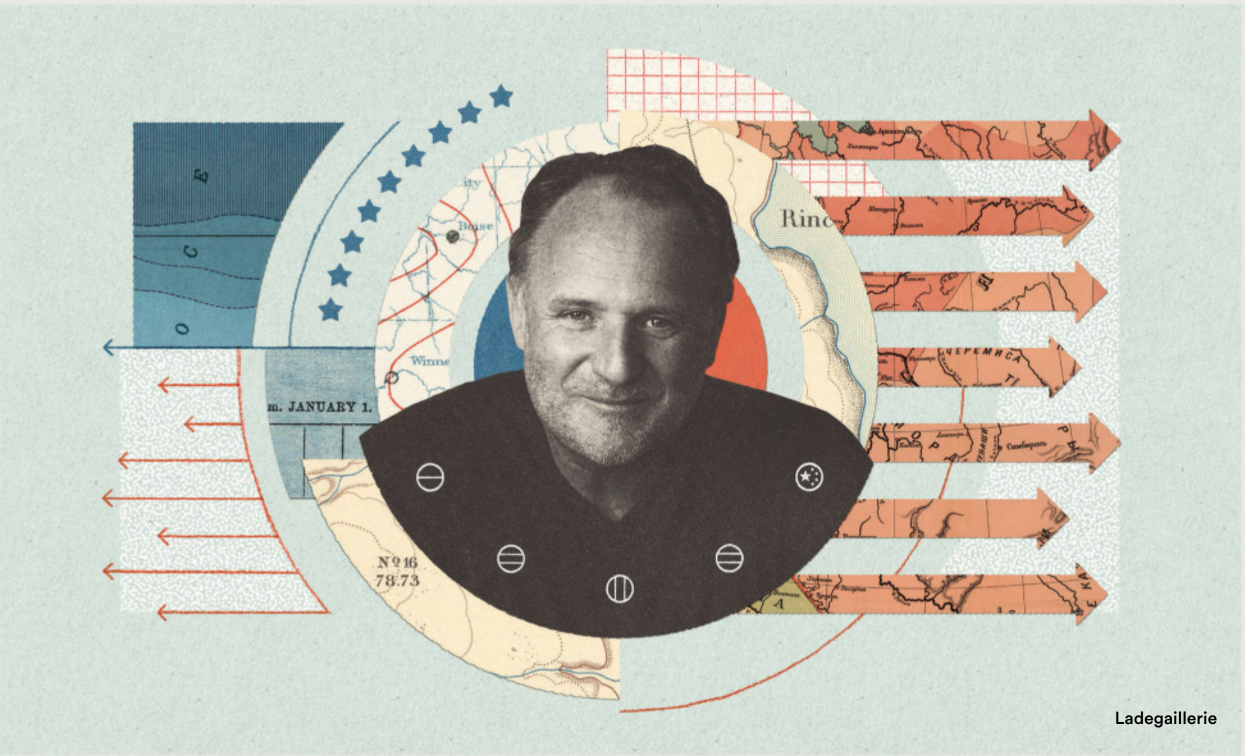
SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING
UMPG
WARNER CHAPPELL
KOBALT
PULSE MUSIC
BMG
SIAE DERIZIONE GENERALE
RESERVOIR
ANTHEM

RADIO AIRPLAY

SONY MUSIC PUBLISHING
UMPG
WARNER CHAPPELL
KOBALT
BMG
PULSE MUSIC
SIAE DERIZIONE GENERALE
ANTHEM
CONCORD
HIPGNOSIS

Sony Music is in advanced talks to acquire a stake in **Bad Bunny**'s label and management company, **Rimas Entertainment**.

The global dance music industry grew 34% to $11.3 billion in 2022.



Ladegaillerie

BELIEVE'S GROWTH STRATEGY TARGETS U.S.

The French company, facing criticism for its continued operations in Russia, has made gains from its digital focus and early bets on emerging markets

BY RICHARD SMIRKE

PARIS — Believe — the Paris-based digital music company that operates in more than 50 countries and has over 1,600 employees — has grown rapidly in recent years from a pure-play European distributor to an international conglomerate, spanning labels, publishing, distribution, marketing, artist management and artist/label services. Fueling that rise has been a series of timely acquisitions, such as its 2015 purchase of TuneCore, and a focus on digital music and early investments in key emerging markets like China, India and Southeast Asia.

Believe's expansion comes as the major labels are increasingly concerned about the dilution of their share of the global streaming market, and now the company has its eyes set on the United States. Amid all this, Believe is still dealing with criticism over continuing to do business in Russia.

The invasion of Ukraine led to a rapid exodus of global music companies from Russia. Believe was a notable exception. It continues to operate in Russia — releasing, distributing and promoting new music by local artists and labels on Russian streaming platforms Yandex Plus, VK Music and Zvuk. That has led to accusations that Believe has exploited the absence of Western competitors to grab share in a market that generated $328 million in recorded-music revenue in 2021, making it the world's 13th-largest music market, according to IFPI's 2022 Global Music Report.

Denis Ladegaillerie, Believe's founder and CEO, takes issue with that charge. Believe's ongoing presence in Russia "is really not an economic decision," he says. "We are not looking at building or growing or extracting value [in Russia]." Ladegaillerie says Believe has "very strictly" abided by all international sanctions placed on Russia since the start of the war and has halted new investments in the now-isolated country. "Our No. 1 priority, both in Russia and Ukraine, has been to protect our teams locally and support our artists," he says.

There have been economic gains for the company, with Believe's revenue from Russia, where it retains just over 40 employees, growing. Combined revenue from Russia and Ukraine rose 9.9% to 57 million euros ($62.8 million) in 2022, up from 52 million euros ($57.3 million) the year before, according to the company's year-end financial figures. (That gain accounted for 7.5% of Believe's overall revenue.)

Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group say they stopped distributing and promoting new releases in Russia following the start of hostilities. If new titles are being made available on local streaming services, the majors say, it's through piracy. "What I see is that all global artists are still available on all local platforms [in Russia]," Ladegaillerie counters, noting that YouTube and Apple Music are also still active in the market, albeit in a reduced capacity.

The controversy over Believe's Russia operations reflects the increasing attention the company is commanding. Believe's business model, which focuses on markets and genres where artist promotion and marketing are predominantly online, is successfully competing with, and in some territories beating, the majors. Believe's revenue grew 31.8% year over year to 760.8 million euros ($723.5 million) last year with the company serving 1.3 million artists, either directly or through labels. In revenue terms, that places Believe — founded in 2005 by Ladegaillerie, a lawyer — right behind German label and publisher BMG, which generated revenue of 866 million euros ($912.6 million) in 2022.

The United States has remained more challenging for the company — though as traditional marketing formats like radio and TV have ceded their centrality Ladegaillerie sees that changing. "We think that with TikTok, with Spotify at a larger scale, with YouTube, there is more opportunity to develop artists [there] digitally," he says.

Believe is strongest in France, where last year the company was the second-largest label in digital local repertoire behind Universal. Top-selling acts there include rapper Jul, whose album *Demain Ça Ira* topped the French charts and has spent 94 weeks in the domestic Top 200. Believe's second-biggest market is Germany, where it was the third-largest recorded-music company for local repertoire streaming last year.

Outside of Europe, the company has been investing heavily in Asia Pacific and Africa for the past decade, signing deals with local label partners — like Filipino label Viva Music and Artists Group and India-based imprints Think Music and Panorama Music — and growing its on-the-ground teams. Revenue from Asia Pacific and Africa rose 40% year over year to 56.1 million euros ($61.8 million) from January through March, representing 28.2% of the company's earnings last quarter.

In India, where Believe has been active since 2013 and partners with between 400 and 500 labels and around 100 artists, ranging from Punjabi pop acts to local hip-hop stars, the company says it is now the No. 1 player in the market. In China, Believe has deals in place with more than 300 local labels and over 250 artists, overseen by a staff of 80 working across five offices.

Mark Mulligan, analyst at MIDiA Research, says Believe is part of a breed of "midsize, next-generation" music companies "carving out a new mold for what a 21st century music business is." He identifies the 2015 acquisition of New York-based distribution company TuneCore as a "crucially important" factor in Believe's year-over-year growth, plugging the company directly "into what this new generation of artists want" and making "the future part of Believe's DNA."

Despite the Russia controversy, Ladegaillerie says artists and labels sometimes choose to partner with his company over major-label rivals because "we are much better at developing artists in the digital world than they are." The German duo Milky Chance — whose 2013 international hit "Stolen Dance" has more than a billion streams on Spotify — left UMG for Believe in 2021, as has the French pop/hip-hop artist Nej'.

"We used to develop artists, and then major record labels [would] take them away from us," Ladegaillerie says. "In the past 18 months, what we have seen is that the tables have turned — we have seen more and more top artists come to us from major record labels." b

Additional reporting by Amit Gurbaxani.

LADEGAILLERIE: ANIS MARTIN

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW HANCOCK

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AND ALL OF
THE 40 UNDER
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Let’s go out

From The Desks Of...

Morgan Hayduk & Andrew Batey

CO-FOUNDERS/CO-CEOs, BEATDAPP

BY ELIAS LEIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL BUCKNER

BEATDAPP co-founders and co-CEOs Morgan Hayduk and Andrew Batey were not initially focused on fighting streaming manipulation. Batey spent years in digital marketing, while Hayduk formerly worked as a lobbyist for the Canadian music industry in the area of copyright protection. At first, they teamed to build an auditing tool that would enable labels to evaluate inconsistencies between their sales reports and streaming services' server logs. Conversations with label executives indicated that "there were pretty often material discrepancies," Hayduk says.

As he and Batey tried to understand those inconsistencies, it became clear that streaming manipulation was causing some of them, and Beatdapp embarked on developing a tool to detect fraudulent streams — which Hayduk defines as the leveraging of "bots, stolen accounts or manipulated platform features" to steal streaming income — and prevent them from impacting payouts.

According to a recent report from the Centre National de la Musique (CNM), a government-backed organization that supports France's music industry, in 2021, over 1 billion music streams — between 1% and 3% of all streams generated in the country that year — were fraudulent. "The methods used by fraudsters are constantly evolving and improving," the report noted, "and fraud seems to be getting easier and easier to commit." If that percentage was applied to IFPI's estimate that global streaming revenue totaled $17.5 billion in 2022, fraudulent streams would amount to $350 million in lost income for legitimate rights holders.

Beatdapp's software sifts through massive amounts of data from partners — including labels, distributors and streaming services — to identify and investigate suspicious patterns. In one case, it identified 10,000 accounts all playing the same 63 tracks. The pair say the company now analyzes hundreds of billions of streams, and while they declined to identify partners, they recently started working with SoundCloud and Napster,

John Esposito exited his role as chairman emeritus at **Warner Music Nashville**, four months after stepping down as chairman/CEO.

Utopia Music announced it would cut 15% of its global workforce in a fresh round of layoffs.

Batey (left) and Hayduk of Beatdapp photographed April 6 in Santa Monica, Calif.

according to two sources.

"If we can make this industry less attractive for financial fraudsters, that will make a positive difference for everybody who's working on music," Hayduk says. "That's what animates us."

Why is streaming fraud an important issue?

MORGAN HAYDUK It hurts everyone who makes a living in the music industry and, left unchecked, creates this promotional race to the bottom where everyone believes they have to cheat to succeed. In cybersecurity terms, it's important to shrink the attack surface of the industry.

ANDREW BATEY In an industry where it's already hard to make something and then promote something and then get paid, you should at least get paid correctly.

How much data is Beatdapp analyzing at this point?

HAYDUK We're looking at about 320 billion streams now. That's about 13 trillion individualized streaming data points when you account for all of the metadata associated with each of those streams. We expect to add data in the neighborhood of another 50 billion streams in [the second quarter] and about another 2 trillion data points on that.

BATEY It's not just the individual stream. You might make 12 decisions in an app, such as how you search — if you clicked on the artist first and then you looked at their song list. We're capturing all of that, anonymized across users. All of that context helps us because if somebody consistently hits, let's say, the exact 11 things for every song they play, that's a pretty obvious case of fraud if they've done that 3,000 times in a week.

How has the industry's perception of streaming fraud changed since you started Beatdapp?

HAYDUK Just hearing people acknowledge the issue is probably the biggest shift. It used to be verboten to speak publicly about streaming fraud. It was all behind closed doors. But I don't think you can fix a problem until you accept its existence. We're starting to get there now and [are] seeing a more widespread willingness to put in place solutions.

How has your perception of the problem changed as your data set has expanded?

HAYDUK The biggest revelation to us has to be that this is way closer to death by a thousand paper cuts than it is a top-of-the-market problem. If you asked us where most of the fraud came from 18 months ago, we probably would have pointed the finger at bigger artists because we would have thought they had the most to gain. But we were missing the point of most of this activity. It's not about changing perception; it's about making money. This isn't a phenomenon that's driven by major labels and major independent label artists or their top artists. The overwhelming majority, like upwards of 80% of what we see is fraud, is coming from — call it non-music content. It's not being released for popular consumption or because these are artists who are trying to get noticed. These are releases that have no commercial purpose except as [instruments of] fraud.

What about the quantity of fraud you're catching?

BATEY When we first started, we genuinely thought fraud would be 1% to 3%. Now we think it's closer to 10% [though some of this is caught]. Also we would have guessed that most of the fraud would occur on the platforms where people were — Spotify, Apple, YouTube. But because it's a lot of financially motivated fraud, what we actually see is that it's easier for the fraudsters to attack all the mid- and long-tail [digital service providers] as well, where they're less likely to get caught and they'll get a similar or better per-stream payout. Why not target all of these smaller DSPs with zero protections in place and get paid across all of them?

France's CNM recently came to the conclusion that fraud is getting easier to commit.

BATEY I 100% agree with that. There are so many ways to exploit platforms. If your job is to deliver the best user experience possible, it often means making it easy for them to access that content and creating really cool ways for them to experience or engage with that content. [When that happens,] there are more ways to manipulate that content for the purpose of exploiting it for a payout.

HAYDUK And the tools that you need to commit fraud effectively and at scale are easier to access now than ever before. The tools that facilitate fraud in e-commerce or ticketing or financial services are also repackaged and repurposed to commit streaming fraud. You can generate fully automated online bot farms using cloud computing in a way you couldn't 10 years ago.

How do you avoid generating false positives when you're hunting for fraud?

HAYDUK We know that a false positive is worth considerably more in the loss column than a false negative, so we adjust our models to account for the fact that they need to be conservative in the right ways.

BATEY You can't get it wrong. If you miss a fraudster, it's OK. We hope we catch them later. If we call something fraud that's not, that's way worse.

Some have suggested that a user-centric payout system might mitigate fraud.

HAYDUK Our view is that it's not going to make that big a difference. It'll change the tactics, but it won't change the motivation. It's a big pot of money on the internet, and generally speaking, the DSPs are still fairly soft targets. A different payout structure will just change the tactics that fraudsters use to aggregate money and divert it their way. Obviously, there's a whole different case for the merits of payout systems if you're an artist or you're a label.

There's a lot of industry concern about artificial intelligence right now. To what extent does AI make it even easier to commit these types of fraudulent activities?

HAYDUK It's a tool. We work for some good AI companies that care about not being a tool for fraudsters. That said, the new models are incredibly powerful, and you can create content at scale. There's no putting the genie back in the bottle when some of these tools emerge. The tougher we make it to get away with fraud, the less valuable the tool becomes in the hands of someone who's wielding it for a bad purpose.

How incentivized are DSPs to care about fraud?

HAYDUK Their biggest partners care, especially in light of what we said earlier: Market share shifts matter to the partners and, therefore, it matters to the DSPs. I think consumers also care because bad recommendations on the DSP side make for bad user experience. And given that every platform is offering roughly the same catalog to the consumer, if your recommendations are substandard, that makes consumers more inclined to choose your competitor.

Some music industry executives worry that public discussions of fraud undermine user confidence.

HAYDUK How many times a week does your bank email you about the extra efforts they're taking to protect you from fraud in the financial sector? It doesn't make me want to boycott my bank when they tell me that. Fans probably want to hear that, as an industry, we're taking steps so that the artists they care about are paid correctly.

BATEY If you're the consumer, your account was hijacked, and now you're getting a bunch of recommended songs that don't make any sense, you're not blaming the fraudster — you're blaming the platform.

What is your dream scenario for fraud mitigation in the industry?

HAYDUK Our view is there are some things you can't do in a vacuum. DSP A can't look at the data from DSP B to help inform its own detection models. It's way too competitive between the platforms to give up the level of data required to do fraud detection at the highest levels. Having a platform in the middle acting as Switzerland, working for the collective benefit of everyone without minimizing the level of competitiveness between the platforms, is the right approach. And it's also an approach that we've seen play out in other verticals with similar dynamics.

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D4vd photographed April 24 in Los Angeles.

21 UNDER 21

This next generation of superstars is savvier than ever — and knows the importance of balancing nonstop careers with a shred of privacy, something that d4vd has already mastered

BY CYDNEY LEE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY NOLWEN CIFUENTES

THE FIRST CONCERT d4vd ever attended was his own. Earlier this year, the singer-songwriter embarked on his first headlining tour, a sold-out six-city trek. "I wasn't into show culture," he says over Zoom from Los Angeles. "I was just at home."

Since stepping out into the world, the 18-year-old has quickly become one of alternative music's most promising new artists. Thanks to his emotive ballads (breakout hit "Romantic Homicide," "Sleep Well") and teen-angst bangers ("Worthless," "DTN"), he boasts a career total of 614.3 million on-demand official U.S. streams, according to Luminate. And now, as d4vd (pronounced "David") prepares for his upcoming debut EP, *Petals to Thorns*, out May 26 on Darkroom/Interscope, his life mostly happens on the move. But making music wasn't always in the cards for the Queens-born, Houston-based d4vd, so he's savoring the movement — and bringing his family along for the ride. (His parents are ever present, with d4vd even panning his phone to his father during this Zoom.)

Growing up, the artist born David Anthony Burke sang in his church choir — playing piano and primarily being exposed to gospel music — but like many other teenage boys, he was also an avid gamer. He took a liking to Fortnite in his early teens and would use popular songs to soundtrack the gameplay montages that he posted on YouTube. But after receiving multiple copyright strikes, his mother encouraged him to create his own music.

By late 2021, d4vd was using his sister's walk-in closet to experiment with the only recording equipment he had at the time: his iPhone, earbuds and online music-making software BandLab. His inspiration came from video-game storylines and alt-rock bands he discovered through other YouTube montages like The Neighbourhood, Arctic Monkeys and Wallows. He created his first song, the ethereal, piano-led "Run Away," and several tracks followed, including "You and I," "Here With Me" and, of course, "Romantic Homicide."

On the melancholy fuzz-rock song that arrived last July, d4vd croons about heartbreak — something he has yet to actually experience himself. The track gained instant success on TikTok, which d4vd credits to his incredibly active presence on the app prior to releasing music. To help promote the song, he posted screen recordings of the vocal stems without ever revealing his identity, both inviting listeners into his process while also fueling the mystery behind his sudden rise.

"Romantic Homicide" peaked at No. 33 on the Billboard Hot 100 and earned top 10 spots on the Hot Alternative Songs, Hot Rock Songs and Hot Rock & Alternative Songs charts. ("Here With Me" also cracked the top 40 on the Hot 100.) Suddenly, d4vd understood the commercial value of a DIY approach — his bedroom songs were emotionally relatable. "You feel like you can make the song yourself," d4vd says of his music. "You hear the flaws in it, too, especially [with me] making it on my phone."

While d4vd says that it's "hard to break through the saturation" of social media, noting it's "super hard to be seen," his prolificness helped him stand out. He recalls the first time he met his manager, Mogul Vision's Josh Marshall, who had discovered his music on SoundCloud even before "Romantic Homicide." "I remember he flew down to Houston the next day, and we [sat] in Panera talking about the music industry, and I was like, 'OK, this is it.' You really can't hesitate. Social media moves so fast. You can blow up as quick as you fall off."

Around the same time, d4vd's parents were moving just as quickly to help him navigate the various labels eager to set up meetings in New York and L.A. By August, as "Romantic Homicide" continued to build, d4vd signed with Darkroom/Interscope — the label responsible for developing Billie Eilish, a superstar whose career d4vd admires especially because of what he thinks is the "perfect timing" of her releases. He signed a management deal with Marshall (along with his day-to-day manager, Robert Morgenroth) at Mogul Vision soon after.

"The Darkroom team, I just feel like we clicked because everybody saw the vision. My management company as well," says d4vd. "I wasn't even trying to be an artist at the beginning, so people who are making plans and seeing the bigger picture, that's who I want to [work] with."

And while d4vd may not have intended to land here, as a Black artist in the alternative space, he now feels honored to be a reference point for young listeners who didn't think that combination was possible. "Before 'Romantic Homicide,' I [hadn't] posted my face. Then I released my live performance of it on YouTube, and people were like, 'You're Black?!' " he says with a laugh. "[I'm] a gateway into that genre. It's an absolute honor and a blessing."

> **"SOCIAL MEDIA MOVES SO FAST. YOU CAN BLOW UP AS QUICK AS YOU FALL OFF."**
>
> **—D4VD**

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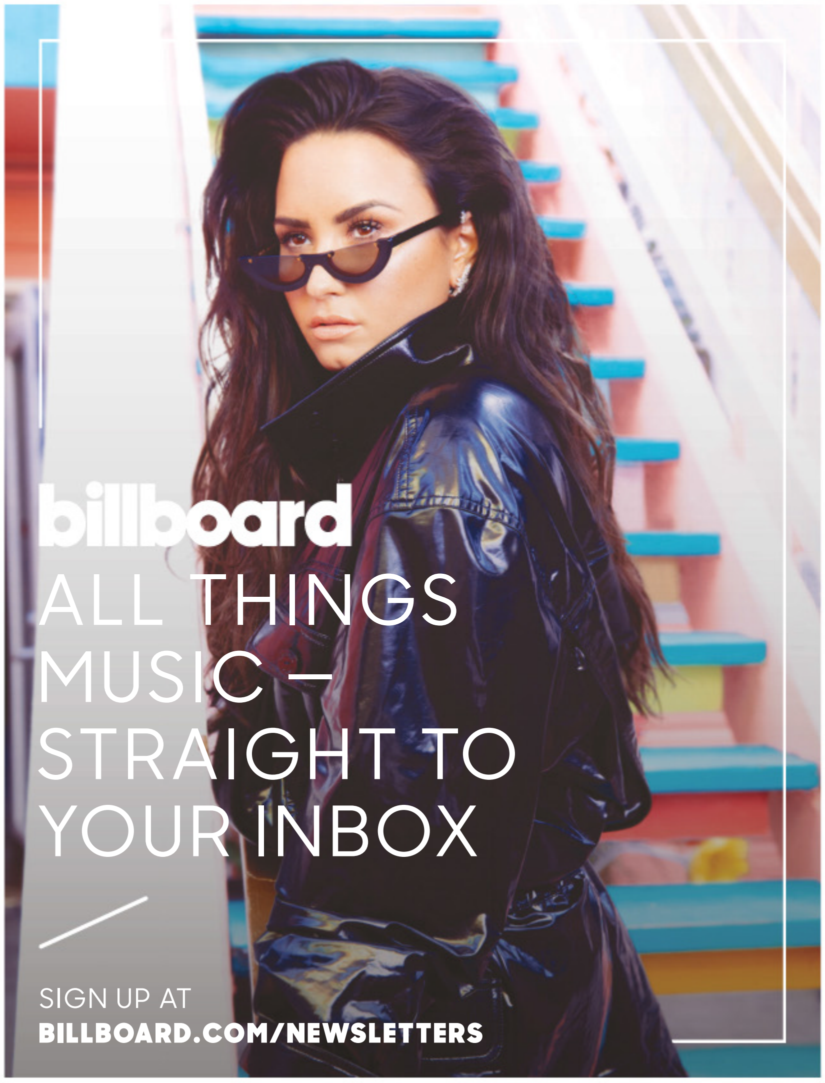

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Olivia Rodrigo

AGE **20**
LABEL **Interscope Geffen A&M**
PUBLISHER **Sony Music Publishing**
MANAGEMENT **Lighthouse Management + Media**
TOTAL STREAMS **6.1 billion**

Two years after releasing her blockbuster debut album, *Sour*, Olivia Rodrigo is still at the top of the pop game, with anticipation swirling around its follow-up. In the last year, Rodrigo wrapped her first headlining tour, graduated from Disney+'s *High School Musical: The Musical: The Series* and gave a number of legends their flowers, inducting Alanis Morissette into the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame, performing at Carly Simon's Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction and presenting Lana Del Rey with the Visionary Award at *Billboard*'s Women in Music event. All the while, she has been preparing to take center stage again, with Rodrigo teasing in a January Instagram story that she's "working on so many new songs I'm excited to show u!" A second tour could be in her near future, too: "I've been seeing a lot more live shows lately, and it makes me really excited to embark on my next tour," she says. "The touring industry is super fascinating to me."

The Kid LAROI

AGE **19**
LABEL **Columbia Records**
PUBLISHER **Sony Music Publishing**
MANAGEMENT **SB Projects**
TOTAL STREAMS **3.1 billion**

After his Justin Bieber collaboration "Stay" became one of the biggest songs of last year, The Kid LAROI started off 2023 strong, announcing his upcoming debut album, *The First Time*, and releasing a string of singles including "Love Again" and "Kids Are Growing Up (Part 1)." His latest, the heart-aching ballad "Where Does Your Spirit Go?," was unveiled during his Coachella set. After signing his label deal at 15 years old, The Kid LAROI recently told *Billboard* that it was both "a big blessing and a bit of a curse" starting out that young. "At 15, you don't know anything ... You're like a literal child," he said. "The cool thing about music and putting stuff out is it's like a time capsule. And it's cool that I get to look back, cringe at it and be proud of the next stuff I'm about to put out."

FLO

AGE **Stella Quaresma, 21; Renée Downer, 20; Jorja Douglas, 21**
LABEL **Island UK/Republic Records**
PUBLISHER **Sony ATV**
MANAGEMENT **Rob Harrison (Listen Generously), Sam Eldridge (Urok Management)**
TOTAL STREAMS **43.5 million**

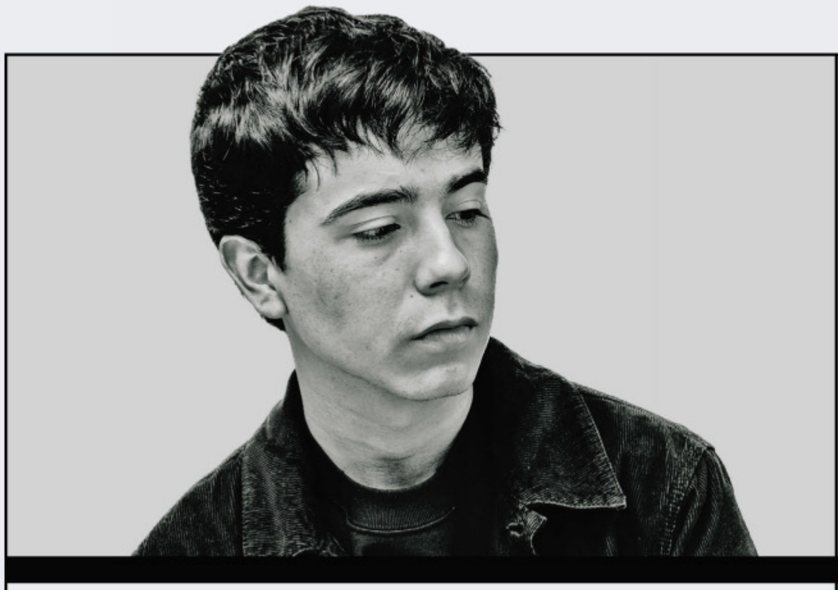
In just one year, British R&B group FLO has created a significant buzz, thanks in part to debut single "Cardboard Box" and its critically acclaimed EP, *The Lead*. The trio, which won the 2023 BRIT Awards' Rising Star trophy, recently tapped Missy Elliott for its single "Fly Girl," which samples the rap icon's 2002 hit "Work It." Having wrapped a sold-out North American tour in April, the members of FLO are most grateful for their listeners; as Douglas puts it, "Having fans that actually love your music and want to be a part of your journey is really special." Ahead, the trio is excited to dive into production and fashion — Quaresma calls Beyoncé "the blueprint for a lot of what we do. Her legacy and what she has done for women in the music industry is so inspirational."

GAYLE

AGE **18**
LABEL **Atlantic Records/Arthouse Records**
PUBLISHER **Arthouse Entertainment**
MANAGEMENT **Kristina Russo**
TOTAL STREAMS **633.5 million**

After "abcdefu" took off on TikTok in 2022, GAYLE proved she was here to stay, entering the top 10 of the Billboard Hot 100 and later earning a nomination for song of the year at the 2023 Grammy Awards. Yet, she believes social media to be a "double-edged sword." She adds: "In my experience, I think it leads to people, more than ever, feeling like they have the right to tear people down that are trying to build themselves up." She admires both Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift, the latter of whom she says has "created such a beautiful and supportive fan base" — one that she has gotten to see in person while opening for Swift's record-breaking The Eras Tour.

RODRIGO: DAVIS BATES. LAROI: JASON NOCITO. FLO: CONOR CUNNINGHAM. GAYLE: ACACIA EVANS.



Ivan Cornejo

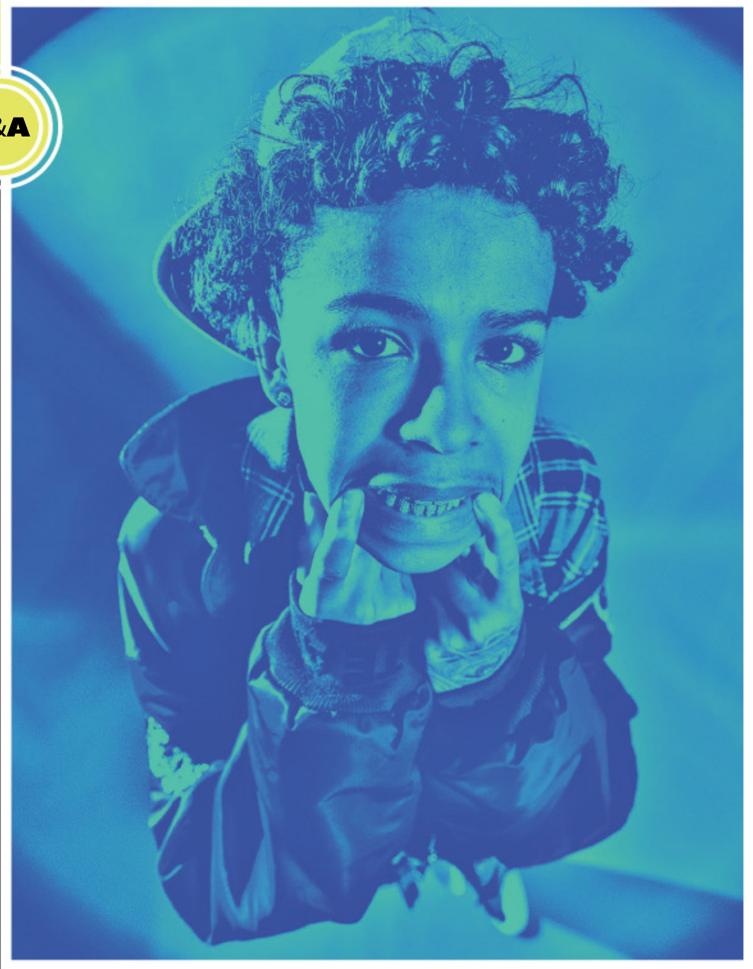
AGE **18**
LABEL **n/a**
PUBLISHER **n/a**
MANAGEMENT **Pamela Cornejo**
TOTAL STREAMS **1.1 billion**

Ivan Cornejo was 17 years old when he secured his first *Billboard* chart entry with his 2021 debut album, *Alma Vacía*, landing at No. 2 on Regional Mexican Albums. That same year, the project's "Está Dañada" became the second regional Mexican song to ever enter the Billboard Hot 100. The singer-songwriter has since maintained momentum, with his *sierreño* tunes — mostly backed by melancholic *requintos* and emotional vocals — helping Cornejo score his first No. 1 on Regional Mexican Albums with his second set, *Dañado*. (A deluxe edition arrived last December.) "The most exciting part about being a young artist is the influence my music can have on other upcoming artists," he says, which can best be reflected in the Yahritza Y Su Esencia-assisted "Inseparables" that dropped last fall.

Yunè Pinku

AGE **20**
LABEL **Platoon**
PUBLISHER **Because Music**
MANAGEMENT **Outlier Artists**
TOTAL STREAMS **2.3 million**

Yunè Pinku, the Malaysian Irish U.K.-based producer-singer-songwriter, only began releasing music in 2021 — but the swell of support for her hypnotic singles has already been overwhelming, encouraging her to "be bolder and braver" on her debut EP, *Babylon IX*, which arrived in April on Platoon. (The project is also powering her first U.S. live shows this summer.) "It's hard sometimes because there's no rulebook, so you're kind of blindly walking through it all," she says of the industry. But it's "pillar female artists" like Madonna, Björk, Lady Gaga and Imogen Heap who continue to inspire her. "There's something I really admire about the unconventional woman in music, who just has this formidable permanence in the face of it all."



Q&A

Luh Tyler

AGE **17**
LABEL **Motion Music/Atlantic Records**
PUBLISHER **n/a**
MANAGEMENT **Javorice Hayes**
TOTAL STREAMS **111.3 million**

LUH TYLER WAS A skilled point guard before picking up a mic and developing his now signature wavy flow and witty bars. Last year, the Tallahassee, Fla., rapper took off when the video for "Law & Order," which reworked the theme to the long-running drama series, garnered over 19 million YouTube views. A deal with Atlantic Records shortly followed, along with his debut mixtape, *My Vision*, which peaked at No. 2 on *Billboard*'s Heatseekers chart — his first entry on any chart.

In the last year, what are you most proud of?
How fast I took off with the music and became one of the hottest rappers in under a year.

What's one area of the industry you're excited to explore or learn more about?
Touring and the gaming and streaming stuff.

What's most exciting and most challenging about being a young artist in today's music industry?
The most exciting part is traveling to new places, doing shows and interacting [with] the fans. The most challenging part is being away from the [family] a lot.

Some of your lyrics are hilarious. How would you describe your sense of humor, and where do you get it from?
All my dawgs I be with are funny, so I probably get my sense of humor from them, but I don't like to be too serious on the mic all the time. I like having fun with the music, so every now and then I'll say some goofy lines.

What are the biggest indicators of success in today's music industry?
Being recognized and known around the world, and being able to take care of [my] family.

Whose career do you admire most and why?
Kodak [Black's], because he started rapping and came up [at the] same age as me and became worldwide.

CORNEJO: MARIO ALBERTO MILÁN/COURTESY OF IMAGINE IT MEDIA. PINKU: LEANDA HELER. TYLER: CHRIS ALLMEID.

Lauren Spencer-Smith

AGE **19**
LABEL **Island Records/Republic Records**
PUBLISHER **Warner Chappell Music**
MANAGEMENT **AG Artists**
TOTAL STREAMS **669.5 million**

Lauren Spencer-Smith is an open book and makes it look easy: After capturing attention with her devastating breakup ballad “Fingers Crossed,” which went viral on TikTok in early 2022 and eventually peaked at No. 19 on the Hot 100, the singer-songwriter has continued to help fans heal with follow-up hits like “Flowers,” “Best Friend Breakup” and “28.” “Going viral is great, but what really matters is if your music is truly resonating with people,” says Spencer-Smith, who signed a joint deal with Island and Republic last year. “There’s no better feeling than watching your music help others. That’s when those viral moments will continue. That’s the real indicator of success.”

DannyLux

AGE **19**
LABEL **VPS Music via Warner Latina**
PUBLISHER **Warner Chappell Music**
MANAGEMENT **Jose Luis Aguilar**
TOTAL STREAMS **217 million**

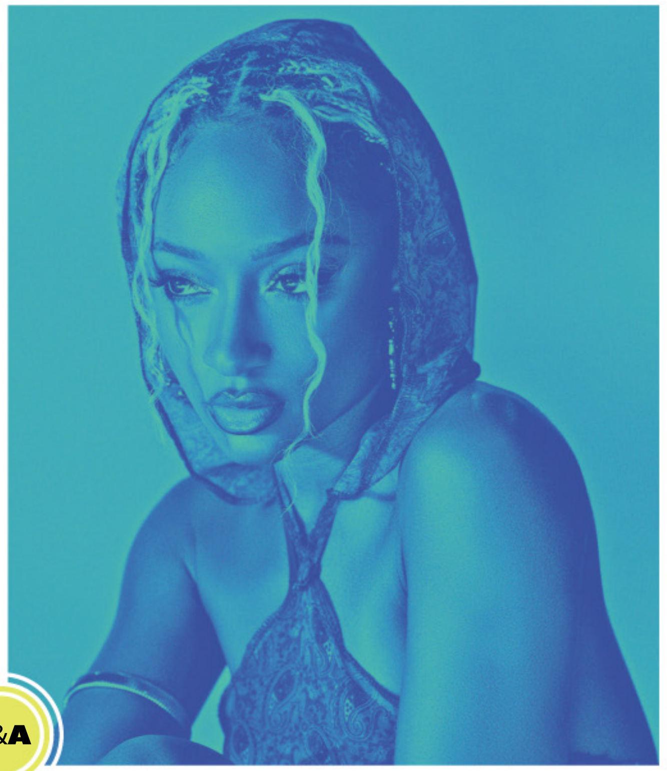
In April, DannyLux made his Coachella debut, performing his signature sad sierreño anthems in front of a significant crowd. It was a full-circle moment for the singer-songwriter, who grew up in the Coachella Valley area. He says he’s most proud of bringing his family along with him, “and for them to experience all of this as well,” but his impact extends well beyond his circle: DannyLux is helping usher in a new global era for Mexican music, which led to a record deal last year with Warner Music Latina in partnership with his independent label, VPS Music. “I feel like there is a lot of pressure,” he says. “You have to stay consistent because it’s so easy to just fall off.”

Lil Tecca

AGE **20**
LABEL **Galactic Records/ Republic Records**
PUBLISHER **Universal Music Publishing Group**
MANAGEMENT **Giuseppe Zappala**
TOTAL STREAMS **4.4 billion**

Since making his Hot 100 debut with the 2019 hit “Ran$om,” Lil Tecca has evolved his sing-song hooks and syrupy melodies. Now boasting 10 Hot 100 hits and three top 10 albums on the Billboard 200 (most recently with 2021’s *We Love You Tecca 2*), the New York rapper has released a string of singles, including “Fallin” and “Tressa,” over the past year, while also flourishing as a reliable guest star on collaborations with Internet Money, Rich Amiri and Mabel. He’s now teasing a new project on Instagram but says he’s most proud of “doing hella adult stuff like getting groceries and shit, that’s my favorite thing to do.”

SPENCER SMITH: SAM DAMESHEK. TECCA: DANIEL PRAKOPCYK. DANNYLUX: ESTEBAN FLORES.



Q&A

Ayra Starr

AGE **20**
LABEL **Mavin Records**
PUBLISHER **Mavin Global Holdings**
MANAGEMENT **Mavin Records**
TOTAL STREAMS **138.2 million**

IN 2021, AFROPOP artist Ayra Starr scored a record deal with one of Nigeria's most influential labels, Mavin Records, thanks to the various covers she had posted to Instagram. That same year, the Beninese-born Nigerian singer not only released her self-titled EP that included breakout hit "Away," which reached No. 17 on *Billboard*'s Top Triller Global chart, but also her debut album, *19 & Dangerous*, that featured Fousheé and Ckay. She has since been featured on songs by Wizkid and Libianca, and in February dropped her latest single, "Sability."

What are the biggest indicators of success in today's music industry?
Real talent, hard work and perseverance. Success can also be shown by how well you handle promotion on socials like Instagram and TikTok, in the way you put yourself out there and how you show a creative and entrepreneurial spirit.

In the last year, what are you most proud of?
I'm able to work and provide for my family.

What's most exciting and most challenging about being a young artist now?
I'm having fun on the road. I'm meeting new people, I'm enjoying myself, and I get to learn new things every day. Because I'm young, there's always room for improvement, there's more things to learn. The most challenging thing is people don't take you seriously because you're young.

What's one area of the industry you're excited to explore or learn more about?
It's definitely fashion. I want to dive more into the fashion industry. I want to learn more about touring and performance. I'm really interested in that element, and I'm enjoying it. Oh, and also acting. I really like acting.

Whose career do you admire most and why?
Rihanna's. She was very consistent for a long time and she has built a legacy, and now she has been able to do different things that she likes, like acting and her businesses.

Nessa Barrett

AGE **20**
LABEL **Warner Records**
PUBLISHER **Sony ATV**
MANAGEMENT **Night**
TOTAL STREAMS **474.1 million**

Last fall, rising alt-pop star Nessa Barrett released her debut album, *young forever*, which was led by the aching single "Die First," dedicated to her late friend Cooper Noriega. In February, she kicked off her first headlining outing of the same name in support of the project. "I never experienced anything like that," she says. "I really found myself as an artist on the stage every night, and it makes me so excited for everything to come." This year, she has released two new singles, "Bang Bang" and "American Jesus," and most recently starred in the latest campaign for Kim Kardashian's SKIMS.

Ángela Aguilar

AGE **19**
LABEL **Machín Récords**
PUBLISHER **SESAC**
MANAGEMENT **Pepe Aguilar**
TOTAL STREAMS **322.8 million**

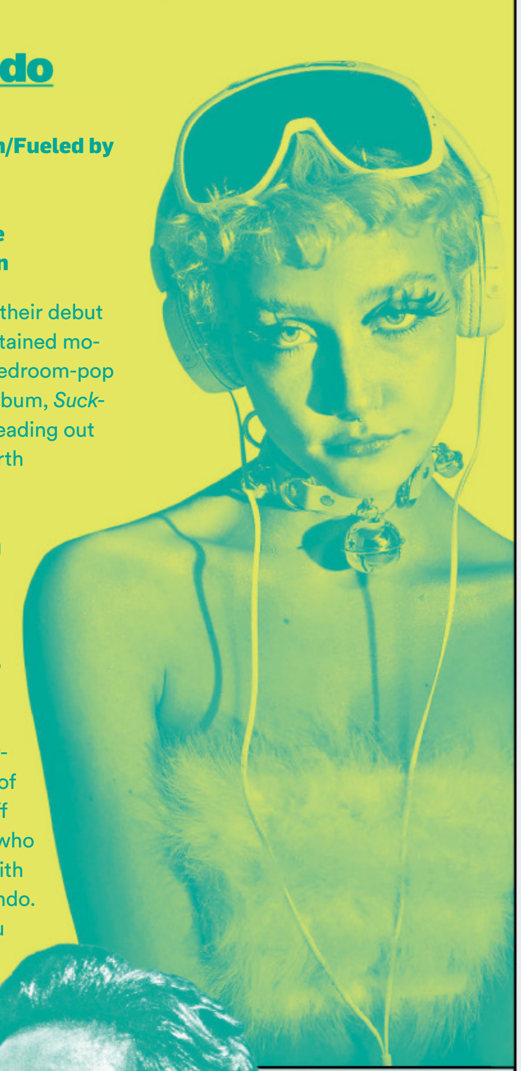
Born to regional Mexican music royalty — her father is Pepe Aguilar and her grandfather is Antonio Aguilar — the artist has become a star in her own right. In March, her collaboration with Yuridia, "Qué Agonía," scored the *ranchera* singer-songwriter her third top 10 entry on *Billboard*'s Latin Airplay chart. After spending the past few years on the road with her family for their top-grossing Jaripeo Sin Fronteras show, the 19-year-old will embark on a solo tour titled Piensa En Mí this summer. Inspired by Pepe's career, she says, "It's nice to have someone that you admire at home, someone who can direct me in the right direction because everything that I'm going through, he has already gone through."

STARR: LEX ASH. BARRETT: COLIN MILLER. AGUILAR: ERICK NIETO.

The Linda Lindas

AGE **Bela Salazar, 18; Lucia de la Garza, 16; Eloise Wong, 15; Mila de la Garza, 12**
LABEL **Epitaph Records**
PUBLISHER **Warner Chappell Music**
MANAGEMENT **Fly South Music Group**
TOTAL STREAMS **12.8 million**

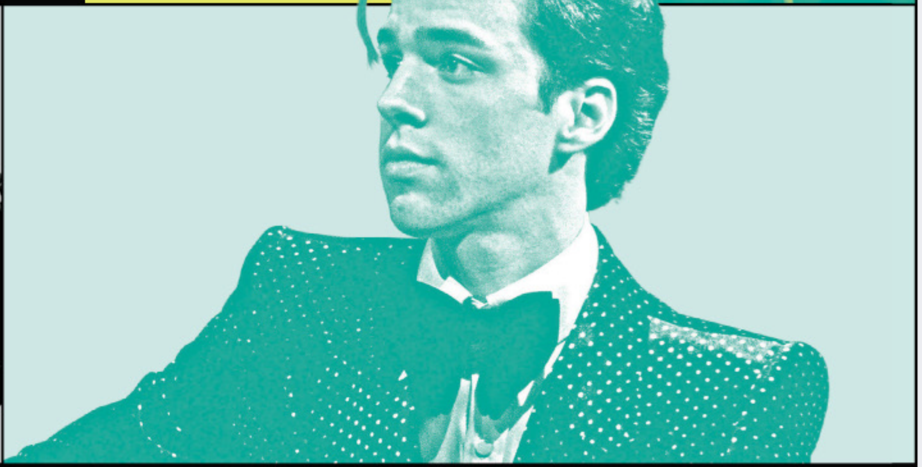
Riding an initial viral wave in 2021 spurred by a live performance of its song "Racist, Sexist Boy" at the Los Angeles Public Library, the four-piece punk group settled in last year with its debut album, *Growing Up*, released on Epitaph. The act subsequently toured the project at festivals, as well as on North American and international treks, during which Lucia de la Garza says she "really got the idea of how widespread the reach of the internet and streaming platforms are." In April, the band returned with single "Too Many Things" and a Coachella performance, which it will follow by opening for Paramore and playing at Lollapalooza Chicago in August.



Chloe Moriondo

AGE **20**
LABEL **Public Consumption/Fueled by Ramen**
PUBLISHER **Kobalt**
MANAGEMENT **Alternate Side**
TOTAL STREAMS **200 million**

Following the 2021 release of their debut album, Chloe Moriondo maintained momentum in 2022: The rising bedroom-pop artist dropped their second album, *Suckerpunch*, in October before heading out on a five-week headlining North American tour. But they say they're most proud of what came after: at long last taking some time off. "It took a lot of touring for me to finally realize how tired I was and how little I was paying attention to myself," they say. Their time on the road paid off, though, helping the up-and-comer further cement their own brand of off-center pop. "The best stuff right now is made by people who are comfortable and happy with their expression," says Moriondo. "Whether that be the way you dress and present yourself visually or the way you create your sounds."



Kidd G

AGE **20**
LABEL **Rebel Music/The Valory Music Co./Geffen Records**
PUBLISHER **n/a**
MANAGEMENT **Hard 8 Working Group**
TOTAL STREAMS **538 million**

Since debuting on the *Billboard* charts with "Dirt Road" in 2020, Kidd G has maintained a presence with his Hot Country Songs hit, "Teenage Dream," and a "Dirt Road" remix with BRELAND. This year, in between his headlining tour dates with opener CB30, he has been back in the studio crafting new music. "I feel like I've figured out what my sound is, and I'm excited to keep growing that," he says, adding that he has been taking notes from Morgan Wallen. "I love his music and admire the way it draws you in. He also has a really good stage presence, which is something I look up to."

Stephen Sanchez

AGE **20**
LABEL **Republic Records**
PUBLISHER **Universal Music Publishing Group**
MANAGEMENT **LoyalT Management**
TOTAL STREAMS **460.2 million**

Plenty of aspiring artists write love songs in their bedrooms intended for their crushes. But few have evoked classic romance quite like Sanchez did with his waltzing, 1950s-indebted hit, "Until I Found You," which soundtracked hundreds of thousands of TikToks featuring wedding and couple celebrations. The 2021 single crossed over from viral success to radio hit last year, reaching No. 23 on the Hot 100 and topping the Hot Rock & Alternative Songs chart. And while the Republic Records crooner has released several versions of "Until I Found You," he has also shared some new, retro-leaning tunes ahead of his fall tour. "There has been a really healthy growth and certainly lots of adjustment," says Sanchez, "but I've been having a hell of a good time along the way."

LINDAS: JESSIE COWAN. MORIONDO: KENNETH CAPPELLO. SANCHEZ: LUKE ROGERS. KIDD G: DAVID O'DONOHUE.

Q&A

Riovaz

AGE **19**
LABEL **Darkroom Records/Geffen**
PUBLISHER **n/a**
MANAGEMENT **Jacob Byrnes, Argenis Hernandez**
TOTAL STREAMS **215.6 million**

SINCE DEBUTING with his *Into the Unknown* EP in 2020, Riovaz has released music at a steady pace, with uptempo dance hits like "Prom Night" and "I Feel Fantastic" being among fan favorites. Most recently, the New Jersey native boosted his catalog with his February EP, *Disturb the Norm* — his first project to arrive since signing to Darkroom Records, in partnership with Geffen, last summer.

What are the biggest indicators of success in today's music industry?
A lot of people are focusing only on streams and followers, which to me doesn't make me fall in love and remember an artist. Success, to me, is to be remembered for your contributions to the music industry and the scene you've built around yourself as an artist. Longevity, consistency and growth are really important for me.

What's the most challenging part about being a young artist today?
The oversaturation of music these days. Everyone wants to make music, and the industry is so fast-paced now. People can cut through just by posting more.

What's one area of the industry you're excited to explore?
I'm excited to start building out a scene and the next wave with my peers. Community has always been a big part of my career in the early days, so taking that from the internet into real life is still such a crazy thing to me.

As someone who has already experimented with many genres, what is your creative process like?
My creative process just consists of me in front of a computer and a beat folder. The music records itself honestly — I make the best songs when I have this butterfly feeling in my stomach; then the words start flushing into my brain.

When it comes time to release a debut album, what's the biggest statement that you want to make about yourself as an artist?
That I'm here to stay. Whether you get it now or in 20 years, everyone will understand one day.

NLE Choppa

AGE **20**
LABEL **NLE Entertainment/Warner Records**
PUBLISHER **n/a**
MANAGEMENT **Tricky Montgomery, Angeleta Potts, Brandon Potts**
TOTAL STREAMS **5.8 billion**

Since emerging in 2019 with his hit single "Shotta Flow," NLE Choppa continues to be a champion for the youth with his contagious energy. In 2023, the Memphis rapper scored two more Billboard Hot 100 entries, boosting his career total to 11, including "Do It Again" with 2Rare and "Slut Me Out." The latter went viral and became Choppa's highest-charting hit on the list, reaching No. 28. Despite "not getting enough rest," Choppa maintains his hunger as an underdog — and believes in long-term planning. "I started at 16. Now I'm 20," he says. "I got 20 more years, and I'm only getting better."

Tate McRae

AGE **19**
LABEL **RCA Records**
PUBLISHER **Sony Music Publishing**
MANAGEMENT **Full Stop Management**
TOTAL STREAMS **2.3 billion**

After releasing her debut album, *I Used To Think I Could Fly*, last spring, Tate McRae has continued to drop pop hits, including "uh oh" and her Tiësto collaboration "10:35," which peaked at No. 69 on the Hot 100 in February. And at the Juno Awards in March, McRae was up for five awards, including single of the year for "She's All I Wanna Be," album of the year for *I Used To Think I Could Fly* and songwriter of the year. She believes the most exciting thing about being a young artist today is also the most challenging: "It's all in your hands — you have the freedom to become anything you want."

Contributors Rania Aniftos, Katie Atkinson, Katie Bain, Stephen Daw, Griselda Flores, Josh Glicksman, Lyndsey Havens, Carl Lamarre, Cydney Lee, Jason Lipshutz, Jessica Nicholson, Jessica Roiz, Neena Rouhani

Methodology *Billboard* editors and reporters weighed a variety of factors in determining the 2023 21 Under 21 list, including, but not limited to, impact on consumer behavior, measured by metrics such as album and track sales, streaming volume (listed here as each artist's on-demand official U.S. career streams, according to Luminate), social media impressions and radio/TV audiences reached; career trajectory; and overall impact in the industry, specifically during the past 12 months. Unless otherwise noted, Luminate is the source for sales/streaming data.

RIOVAZ: KAYLA MENZE. MCRAE: BETH SARAVO. CHOPPA: GUNNER STAHL.

ICY HOT

Just two years after her debut single, viral Bronx rapper **ICE SPICE** has scaled the charts and been dubbed “the People’s Princess” by her fans. But she’s still adjusting to the spotlight

BY HERAN MAMO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHRISTIAN CODY

Ice Spice photographed April 19 in New York.

Styling by Marissa Pelly
Versace top and skirt, Balmain boots, Le Vian jewelry.

Alaïa playsuit, Stuart Weitzman shoes, Tiffany & Co. jewelry.

AT THE BEGINNING OF 2021 — a year before she introduced herself to the world as Ice Spice, with her signature cinnamon curly afro — Isis Gaston wrapped her hair into two braids and tucked them underneath a silk scarf. Wearing a black lounge set, she smiled for the camera while a sample of Nelly's "Hot in Herre" faded into the background and the hook of "Buss It," rapper Erica Banks' breakout 2020 single, started. The clip cut, and Gaston, now clad in a teal cut-out dress, dropped it low and twerked with her long, light brown locks cascading over her frame.

The viral video was just one of millions from the "Buss It" TikTok challenge, which helped Banks earn her first Billboard Hot 100 entry, a Travis Scott remix and a partnership with Warner Records in conjunction with her own label, 1501 Certified Entertainment. But for the then-21-year-old Gaston, who was just mustering the courage to record her own music, the TikTok trend and the way it boosted Banks' career seemed like something she could achieve, too.

> "The first time I met her, I knew she was special. I knew she was a global superstar in the making."
>
> **—MICHELLE JUBELIRER**

"It was so funny — I was already working on my first song ever that I was recording. I had already wrote little raps and shit before that, [but] it took me a lot to get to recording. I was halfway done with it when I did the 'Buss It' challenge. When I saw it going so viral, I was like, 'Damn, imagine that was my song I was twerking to,' " she recalls today with a chuckle. "The next month, I put out my first song and took it from there."

In March 2021, Ice Spice dropped her sharp-tongued debut single, "Bully Freestyle," which was produced by RIOTUSA, whom she had met through a mutual friend while attending the State University of New York (SUNY) at Purchase. For the next year-and-a-half, Ice refined her craft — and in August 2022, she independently released "Munch (Feelin' U)" and finally experienced the success she had always envisioned.

"Munch" — or, as Ice defined it, "somebody that's really obsessed with you that's just fiending to eat it" — immediately entered the pop culture lexicon. After delivering the deliciously cynical line "You thought I was feeling you," Ice spends the song shooting down voracious admirers and envious haters alike with cutthroat bars that bounce off RIOTUSA's menacing production. In the official music video, she smizes before flashing cameras, twerking once again — but this time while wearing a pale green tube top, denim booty shorts and neon orange nails that complement her now-famous 'fro. TikTok users devoured "Munch" (which has since accumulated 2.4 billion views on its hashtag); Drake played it on his SiriusXM channel, Sound 42; and the song quickly became the New York drill anthem of the summer. Audiences crowned Ice "the People's Princess."

"I saw all of my supporters being like, 'She's the People's Princess! She's Princess Diana!' " Ice remembers. "At first, I was confused. I was like, 'Um, Princess Diana? Out of everybody?' But [then] I was like, 'Fuck it, she's iconic.' " And judging by the way Ice, now 23, commands the luxurious high-rise apartment at 432 Park Ave. — one of the tallest residential buildings in the world, where our conversation is happening — she's now well aware of her sovereignty. She struts the hallway in cotton candy-toned regalia: a baby blue velvet cropped hoodie, MRDR BRVDO jeans with pink distressed patches and cloud-dyed Air Force 1s. Her omnipresent $100,000 chain featuring a diamond-encrusted cartoon rendering of her face hangs around her neck, and she frequently checks herself out in a metallic pink Balenciaga Le Cagole rhinestone-embossed purse with a heart-shaped mirror.

Last fall, about a month after the release of "Munch," Ice signed a label deal with 10K Projects and Capitol Records. At the beginning of 2023, she treated her fans (collectively called the Spice Cabinet, individually known as Munchkins) to her debut EP, *Like..?*, a six-song set named for her signature interjection, which further flashed her lyrical vocabulary and expanded her drill sound. The project debuted in the top 10 of *Billboard*'s Top Rap Albums chart and the top 40 of the Billboard 200, while its Lil Tjay-assisted "Gangsta Boo" debuted at No. 82 on the Hot 100, marking Ice's debut entry on the chart. When she joined forces with fellow online sensation PinkPantheress on "Boy's a liar Pt. 2" in February, the track vaulted both artists to No. 3 on the Hot 100.

Like her memorable one-liners, Ice's hits keep coming: In April, her idol, Nicki Minaj, hopped on the remix of *Like..?* track "Princess Diana," which debuted at No. 4 on the Hot 100 and became the first No. 1 on Hot Rap Songs by two co-billed women in its 34-year history.

"The first time I met her, I knew she was special. I got that tingling feeling [I get] every time when you meet that [kind of] artist," says Michelle Jubelirer, CEO/chair of Capitol Music Group. "I knew she was a global superstar in the making."

But despite projecting confidence, Ice is still adjusting to the spotlight. And if she was once a bit shocked by the Princess Diana comparisons, she has lately come to understand the late icon's plight a little better, as she's increasingly faced her own share of alarming encounters with onlookers. When she performed at a New York Fashion Week afterparty in February, fans swarmed her by the DJ booth, prompting security to escort her offstage midperformance. Ice even had to push people off herself.

"I'm not going to lie: I was scared in that moment. I was kind of worried because we was a little outnumbered that night," she confesses. But her tone swiftly shifts to gratitude: "But looking back, I was like, 'This is really a blessing being able to just see how excited people are to see me perform.' "

Balancing exposure and privacy is tough for any rising artist and their team. Her manager, James Rosemond Jr., remembers hip-hop super-agent Cara Lewis (who now counts Ice as a client alongside the likes of Travis Scott and Eminem) and promoters blowing up his phone after the performance about what had happened, even though it never posed a threat to him, given the security measures they had in place.

"It's been eight months since 'Munch,' and as anybody can see, it went from zero to 100 — real quick," he says in April, nodding to the Drake song. He met Ice in March 2022 through his client Diablo, a DJ-producer who was working with her for the first time at New York recording studio Blast Off Productions. "Me and her manifested each other — I was looking for a female act, and she was looking for a manager," he says. Rosemond, 30, now manages Ice, RIOTUSA and Diablo under Mastermind Artists, the management and label company that he started in 2019. But the last year has taught him that management isn't just about discovering and developing great artists — it's also about protecting them. And at this transitional stage in Ice's career, where she falls somewhere between rising rap star and culture-shifting sensation, Rosemond is having "real conversations" with her about what's happening while giving her the space to say no.

Jubelirer and 10K co-presidents Zach Friedman and Tony Talamo are betting on Ice to become the next "global superstar," a term all three use independently. But as they root for her to take off — "It's a rocket, and we're just holding on," Friedman says — she's still finding her footing. "It's been less than a year of me being famous, so it is definitely an adjustment," she admits. As she aims to live up to the

HAIR BY DIJAH SLAYY. MAKEUP BY KARINA MILAN AT THE WALL GROUP. SET DESIGN BY JACOB BURSTEIN AT MHS ARTISTS.

lofty title that industry patrons and fans have anointed her with while still protecting her peace and privacy, Ice is trying to enjoy the lightning-fast ride while steeling herself for all that comes with it.

I**SIS GASTON** was born one of one. Entering the world on Jan. 1, 2000, she was practically predestined to rule her generation. Growing up in the Bronx, she admits with a sigh, she found her birthday "annoying, [because] everybody else is just celebrating New Year's, but it's my birthday." But long before she assumed any title, she knew how to set an example. Ice's four younger siblings looked up to her, and in turn, she looked up to her father — an underground rapper.

"While I was growing up, I wasn't like, 'My father's a rapper, so I'm going to be one, too,' " she says; still, "seeing somebody go to the studio and always hearing hip-hop music," like New York heavyweights Jay-Z, 50 Cent and Wu-Tang Clan, planted the seeds for her career. And while she didn't manifest becoming a rapper, "I did manifest being successful," she says matter-of-factly. Ice credits her mother, along with Rhonda Byrne's book *The Secret*, for teaching her about manifestation and the law of attraction when she was just 10 years old.

It wasn't until 2019, when fellow New Yorker Pop Smoke popped off, that Ice grew interested in drill music, the hip-hop subgenre characterized by nihilistic and realistic lyrics about the inescapable prevalence of violence in major cities, punctuated with gunplay-like production loaded with rattling hi-hats and ad-libs like *"Brrrrr-rrap!"* and *"Grrrrr!"*

Drill originated on Chicago's South Side in the early 2010s, defined by dark, slow tempos (borrowed from Atlanta trap music) and popularized by Chief Keef and Lil Durk, among others. Soon, the style traveled across the pond — and intermingled with grime, garage and road rap, molding U.K. drill. In Brooklyn, Bobby Shmurda and Rowdy Rebel started borrowing from Chicago drill's sinister storytelling and injecting New York's boisterous energy. They rapidly became hometown heroes: Both rappers scored label deals with Epic Records, and Shmurda's smash "Hot N—a" landed in the top 10 of the Hot 100. Yet their promising come-ups — and New York drill's emergence — stalled in December 2014, when Shmurda, Rebel and affiliates in the GS9 hip-hop collective were arrested on conspiracy to murder, weapons possession and reckless endangerment charges.

But within five years, the Brooklyn drill scene had a new figurehead: The 20-year-old Smoke, who lent his gruff yet suave voice to ominous 808 drum loops, courtesy of U.K. drill pioneer 808MeloBeats, for hits like "Welcome to the Party" and "Dior" that became street anthems. "I feel like Pop Smoke brought this new life back to it, and I was just obsessed," Ice says of the rapper, who was murdered in February 2020. "He brought a lot of light into New York and definitely paved the way for a lot of current drill rappers."

When Ice enrolled at SUNY Purchase, she pursued friendships with producers who could help her make her own mark in the drill scene. "I had a couple producer friends on campus that never would fucking send me a beat. And I'm like, 'Hello?' Nobody wanted to send me beats but RIOT," she says of the producer — the son of WQHT (Hot 97) New York DJ/radio personality DJ Enuff — who became her go-to collaborator.

"Ice and RIOT are like Shaq and Kobe. You just don't

Miu Miu top and skirt, Stuart Weitzman shoes, Le Vian and Jennifer Fisher jewelry.

break it up. You let them do their thing, and they're going to cook every night," says 10K's Talamo.

The duo started off by sampling 2010s EDM hits like Zedd and Foxes' "Clarity" and Martin Garrix and Bebe Rexha's "In the Name of Love" to soften drill's rough edges and contrast Ice's low-pitched, laid-back voice with pitched-up, bubblegum pop melodies and flashes of tenderness in the lyrics.

"Back in 2021, there was a big wave of sample drill where they were sampling a whole bunch of popular tracks. But I like finding things that either I had a connection to or are abstract samples," RIOT explains. "So with 'No Clarity,' I was going through old EDM tracks, and when I came across it, it was real nostalgic for me because I loved that song when I was 12. I'm like, 'Yo, we have to do this one!' I made the beat, and Ice loved it."

They didn't clear the sample for the song, released in November 2021, but Zedd let it fly — and even invited Ice to perform it with him at Miami's Ultra Music Festival in March. "Funny thing about that performance is right before I went onstage, his laptop wasn't working. And he said that that hadn't happened to him in 10 years, so I was like, 'It's because I'm here,' " she recalls. "It ended up working out fine. I went out there and did 'In Ha Mood' and 'No Clarity' real quick, but the crowd was definitely a different crowd that I've never performed for."

Zedd's stage setup at Ultra, with smoke canons firing right at the artist, also felt foreign to her. But as she has quickly graduated to large stages, one aspect of performance has

Alaïa bodysuit, Stuart Weitzman shoes, Le Vian jewelry.

been unexpectedly familiar: The athleticism required to run around them brings Ice back to her volleyball days in high school and college. “That’s what be motivating me to go into the gym. I’ve been working out lately, and I’m going to have that breath control down pat, feel me?” she says.

While Ice adapts to bigger stages, Rosemond is adapting to higher-stakes management operations — and drawing from old inspirations. Those include one of his college textbooks, *All You Need To Know About the Music Business* by Donald S. Passman, or as Rosemond calls it, “the bible of the music business.” After dropping out of Bay State College in Boston, he flew to Los Angeles to meet with Passman, a family friend, to get advice that helped him start his previous management company, RoyalDream Projects, in 2012. And like Ice, he also learned a lot from his father, James “Jimmy Henchman” Rosemond, the famed hip-hop mogul who formerly managed The Game, Gucci Mane and many more.

“I was privy to a lot of his dealmaking, and me being a sponge allowed me to soak up what contracts looked like and how to approach labels,” Rosemond says. Before labels began approaching Ice, he advised her, “ ‘Let’s do it ourselves first.’ Deals came to her — production deals, 360 deals — but they were deals that I knew could be better, and in order to get a better deal, you have to go out and do it yourself.”

> “I saw all of my supporters being like, ‘She’s the People’s Princess! She’s Princess Diana!’ At first, I was confused ... But [then] I was like, ‘Fuck it, she’s iconic.’ ”
>
> **—ICE SPICE**

While Ice’s team independently released her first two major singles, “Munch” and “Bikini Bottom,” Rosemond tapped Create Music Group for distribution, after the company partnered with WorldStar HipHop in 2021 to launch a full-service music distribution hub called WorldStar Distro. “I knew Create Music had sister companies — WorldStar, Genius, Datpiff. So my thing was, ‘Here’s this record. Here’s the vision,’ ” he explains. From there, Rosemond made sure those branches executed the vision: WorldStar HipHop premiered Ice’s music videos on its YouTube channel, while Genius had her perform “Munch” on its *Open Mic* series. “We was able to be very strategic with it — and it worked.”

To help him and Ice navigate the ensuing label bidding war and emerge with the friendliest possible terms, including owning her masters and publishing, Rosemond hired his high school acquaintance Leon Morabia, an attorney from the newly merged powerhouse firm Mark Music and Media Law, P.C., which represents established acts from Billie Eilish to Guns N’ Roses. So when he and Ice arrived at a dinner meeting with 10K and Capitol at Nobu Malibu last summer, “We wasn’t freestyling it. We had that vision walking in,” he says.

“We were not going to leave that dinner until we knew that she would be an artist that we would be building together and working together until the day she stops performing,” says Jubelirer.

After Morabia made sure the most important terms were in her favor, Ice inked her deal with 10K and Capitol, which immediately began assisting in the promotion of singles to radio and clearing samples, like Diddy’s “I Need a Girl (Pt. 2)” on “Gangsta Boo,” released in January. But Ice had secured assurances that her creative autonomy would remain intact. “No one on the label side touches the music. There is no traditional A&R with her. No one’s picking beats, no one’s saying, ‘Do this, do that,’ ” Friedman says. “It’s all her. We’re on her schedule.”

ICE IS CURRENTLY prepping the deluxe version of *Like..?* for this summer; while that project keeps her in the discourse, she can complete and release her debut album at her own pace. But Ice and RIOTUSA are manifesting even bigger things ahead.

“I just want more accolades. I just want to put out more music,” she says, while RIOTUSA adds, “I want to have multiple No. 1s on the Hot 100 chart. I want to have Grammys. I just want to have timeless music.” He followed Ice’s lead by writing down his goals in a journal every day. “At first, I was a little skeptical, feel me? But I started writing, and literally every single thing we started writing just started coming true. I’m on my fourth book now.”

When asked about their dream collaboration, both Ice and RIOTUSA are at a loss for words because they’ve already checked it off with Minaj. Ice credits Rosemond for ultimately making her dream come true. “I’m listening to her. Who’s her idol? Nicki, Nicki, Nicki, Nicki, Nicki. My thing is, how do I get her Nicki? And it’s being persistent,” he says. “It took months to get Nicki on board, and it happened.” (In tandem with the remix’s release, Minaj announced on her *Queen Radio* show that she established a partnership with Ice under Minaj’s new label, Heavy On It, but Rosemond declined to comment on the matter; Minaj’s reps did not respond to a request for comment.)

The destined alliance between rap’s newly crowned princess and its long-reigning queen had been fulfilled, exciting the Spice Cabinet and the Barbz. At the end of the music video, Ice and Minaj exchange wide-eyed glances and grins à la Minaj and Beyoncé’s 2015 “Feeling Myself” video, which Rosemond says was unplanned but demonstrates their “chemistry. And that’s big with Ice. She wants to work with people who want to work with her, but she’s very selective. It has to make sense.”

PinkPantheress felt similarly about “Boy’s a liar” when her label, Warner Music UK, pressed her to release a remix. “People kept mentioning it to me for charting reasons, but I was not really interested,” she tells *Billboard*, adding that she was only open to the idea if it involved another up-and-coming female artist who piqued her interest.

“[Ice] was kind of perfect. I saw she was following me, so I casually asked her if she would be down to do a remix. And she was really up for it. It was just literally through the DMs,” Pink recalls, while Ice adds, “I knew our fans would really appreciate it because I saw them wanting us to collab for a little bit.” In a matter of days, Ice sent over her verse, and Pink’s engineer, Jonny Breakwell, added it to the track. The next week, the British singer-songwriter-producer jetted to New York to shoot the video, and she instantly connected with her Bronx-bred collaborator. “Being Gen Z ‘It’ girls of the internet era, I feel like we had a lot in common, even though we’re from two completely different places,” says Pink.

The professional camera crew captured the duo’s chemistry, but one fan’s surreptitiously filmed video started a “wildfire,” as Ice calls it, on TikTok one month before “Boy’s a liar Pt. 2” dropped. After she was caught off guard by the remix blasting throughout the neighborhood, the guerrilla filmer had spotted Ice and Pink filming in a nearby fire escape. She wasn’t the only local who observed the shoot. “There was a little group of boys down the block just screaming the whole time,” Ice recalls. “And then they was on the roof of the other building, watching us do the roof scenes, screaming. It was so funny.”

By now, Ice has learned that such distractions come with the territory — after all, as she raps in the song, “In the hood, I’m like Princess Diana” — and aren’t likely to let up any time soon. If she can laugh at them or make them work in her favor, she’ll eventually become the global superstar she intends to be. She’s already a face of two huge celebrity brands, Beyoncé’s Ivy Park and Kim Kardashian’s SKIMS. And she’s not shying away from the cameras any time soon: She’s also interested in acting. “But right now, I’m focused on music,” she says. “I’m still learning a lot, to be honest. But I’m so happy I’ve put in that time and that work — because it’s paying off.” ◼

FIREBOY DML
PE
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From left: Davis, Ghazi and Etminan photographed April 12 at EMPIRE in San Francisco.

KENZO
PARIS

How To Build An EMPIRE

From its Bay Area headquarters, the company became a power player that shaped the way major competitors did business. Now it's an undeniable force in Africa and looking to replicate its success on a global scale — without losing its drive or identity

BY DAN RYS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KATIE LOVECRAFT

ASAKE LEANS BACK IN HIS CHAIR, PHONE GLOWING IN THE DARKENED STUDIO, as Olamide hunches over his right shoulder. Suddenly, the engineer signals, and the backbone of a song swirls through the speakers while Asake begins teasing out melodies and lyrics in Yoruba, a language of his native Nigeria. The engineer cuts, rewinds and plays, and the loop once again floods the vacuum-like silence that envelops a recording studio.

Outside the room, the building is bubbling with activity and energy as artists, songwriters and engineers mill about, playing unreleased records and eating from a buffet of Nigerian food — smoked mackerel, okra soup, goat, garlic shrimp and crab — prepared by local chefs. But this is not West Africa; it's San Francisco, at the new studio headquarters of Bay Area-based music company EMPIRE. In early March, EMPIRE was in the midst of a two-week writing camp for three of its biggest Nigerian talents: budding Afrobeats superstar Asake, his YBNL Nation label boss and Nigerian music legend/mogul Olamide and Fireboy DML, another emerging YBNL/EMPIRE artist, whose 2021 single, "Peru," was remixed with Ed Sheeran and exploded into a global hit. "Peru" was the first song Fireboy created at EMPIRE's studios near San Francisco's Mission District, which the company just expanded and overhauled into a first-class, multipurpose creative hub.

The studio is now the epicenter for all that EMPIRE intends to be: a fully operational label group that can sit at the top table alongside the majors and compete at the highest levels of the global music business and beyond — TV, film, podcasts, gaming, social media, nightlife and more. And it's currently the platform for one of EMPIRE's biggest achievements: The company is among the foremost global distributors of Afrobeats, the umbrella term for a variety of musical genres emerging from sub-Saharan Africa, where recorded-music revenue has ballooned 34.7% year over year, according to IFPI, the fastest pace in the world.

Davis

"The music that they're making here is, honestly, the most culturally important thing I've done in my entire career, and I've been in the music business since I was 14," says EMPIRE founder/CEO Ghazi while walking through the space. "These guys are the kings of where they come from, and they're about to be the kings of everywhere if we keep doing what we're doing. It's phenomenal to see what's happening."

EMPIRE's dominance in Nigeria, in particular, is immense. On the country's TurnTable Charts, EMPIRE ended 2022 with the top three artists (Asake, Burna Boy and BNXN), the top two songs (Kizz Daniel's "Buga," and Asake and Fireboy's "Bandana") and the top album (Asake's *Mr. Money With the Vibe*), while also earning the distinctions of top label and top distributor for the year. At one point, EMPIRE artists held the top slot on the Nigeria 100 for 26 consecutive weeks, and an EMPIRE song was No. 1 for 35 weeks over the course of the year. (The song Asake recorded in San Francisco was released in April as "2:30" and became his ninth No. 1 on the Nigeria 100.) EMPIRE's relationship with Olamide and YBNL, which began in 2016 before being formalized as a partnership in early 2020, has given it both credibility and a draw to attract artists, and has become a significant success story in the region.

"They are a major organization in Nigerian music," says Ayomide Oriowo, co-founder/head of operations of TurnTable Charts. "After 2019, when they did the deal with Olamide, they capitalized on that and became a bigger deal. It was also at the moment when the 'Afrobeats to the world' [movement] was really taking off. So the timing worked for them, and it was just perfect. Word travels fast when you're an artist — this idea of, 'They have the power to get us here.' "

Now the challenge is to replicate that success elsewhere — in the Middle East/North Africa region, in the Asia-Pacific, in South America and beyond — without losing the drive and identity that Ghazi and his company have cultivated over the past 13 years.

The evening runs late — it's past 10 p.m. — but suddenly, the room is buzzing with energy, and everyone moves into the building's marble-floored lobby. After a beat, Ghazi brings Fireboy in to surprise him with an RIAA platinum plaque for "Peru" as the staff gather around, taking photos and popping champagne. "This is the first platinum plaque we hang on the wall here for a song that was created here — the first of many," Ghazi says amid the jubilation.

Later, he takes a more reflective tone. "It's like a zenith point in my life," he says. "It brought me all the way back to my beginning: in a studio, making a record, and then taking that record and putting it into a company that was a culmination of many years; to be able to put out that record and market it, promote it, distribute it, manufacture it and create accolades and international nominations. And then that record became the record that made a bunch of other African artists say, 'I want to go to the studio where this was made. I want to have that same experience and that same magic.' "

TWO DAYS LATER, Ghazi is sitting at a Mediterranean restaurant in downtown San Francisco near the EMPIRE offices, explaining how he built a company that credibly grew into its name.

EMPIRE's realm is not limited to West Africa — over the past decade-plus, it has also become one of the Bay Area's biggest and most successful homegrown music companies. Half of its nearly 200 employees are based in the city (a distinction Ghazi is particularly proud of), and it's a significant player in the independent hip-hop scene across the United States, which provided the fertile ground from which the company was born. Having its headquarters in Ghazi's hometown has given EMPIRE a domain of its own, along with access to the best minds in technology and media that flock to Silicon Valley.

Ghazi launched EMPIRE in 2010 as a tech-first digital distributor amid the fervor of Digital Music Industry 2.0 zeal then sweeping through the Bay. He had started working at Ingrooves in 2006, which had an office down the street; IODA, which eventually merged with The Orchard, was in the same building; farther down the hallway, two guys were building Twitter. Additionally, SoundCloud, Pandora, Rdio and Mog (which, after several iterations, morphed into what became Apple Music) all had offices in San Francisco.

Ghazi had essentially come up within the cultures of two of his home city's best exports: first as a recording engineer turned studio owner, working with some of the legends of Bay Area hip-hop, and then building servers for computer companies in Silicon Valley.

"I'd be at my Silicon Valley job from 9 to 6, and then I would jump in the car and drive an hour through traffic straight to the studio, order pizza to the studio, then work there until three, four in the morning," he says. "Then I would go home, take a shower, sleep like four hours and go right back to my Silicon Valley job. I would sleep in my car on lunch breaks and put my pager on vibrate so it would wake me up. Then I'd go right back to work."

That background — a base in tech, plus deep connections to the Bay's hip-hop scene — led him to Ingrooves, which was trying to break into the rap market. But after three years navigating the company's bureaucracy while continuing to run a studio, Universal Music Group (UMG) bought half of Ingrooves (it now owns the company outright), and Ghazi left to form EMPIRE. Early on, he relied on his connections to make not just new releases available, but also offer rappers' catalogs digitally, sometimes for the first time — and to get them paid monthly, rather than quarterly or not at all. The ability to move quickly, with one-off nonexclusive deals and a client-friendly front end, helped the company expand rapidly through word-of-mouth, first through the Bay, then down to Los Angeles — where EMPIRE put out indie albums by the likes of Kendrick Lamar, ScHoolboy Q and Anderson .Paak — then to Houston and beyond.

EMPIRE truly began making its mark in 2016, when it distributed D.R.A.M.'s hit "Broccoli," which was picked up by Atlantic Records, and the Fat Joe and Remy Ma record "All the Way Up"; both songs earned Grammy nominations. The following year, it released XXXTentacion's debut album, *17*, which debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard 200 and has racked up 3.5 million equivalent album units in the United States, according to Luminate. Without much fanfare, the company had become a hip-hop heavyweight, filling in the gaps that the traditional industry couldn't, or wouldn't, serve: the up-and-coming artists who hadn't yet caught the majors' eyes and veteran acts who had phased out of the hit-driven system.

At the same time, the industry was shifting. Apple Music had debuted in 2015, streaming had finally begun to return the music business to growth, and EMPIRE's flexible offering forced rival music companies, including the major-label groups, to offer deals with similar terms and services as they competed for talent. Suddenly, the label pipeline burst into a fire hose, and everyone wanted in on the nimble, flexible and global distribution model that EMPIRE had made its bread and butter. New companies like UnitedMasters, Stem and Create popped up with seed money to buy into the distribution market; labels launched distribution-first imprints (Capitol's Priority, Republic's Imperial); and streaming services and social media companies like SoundCloud and, briefly, Spotify began offering independent artists the ability to distribute their music through them. Before long, it seemed that almost every label had a distribution-first option, while the label groups beefed up their own offerings, flooding the zone that EMPIRE helped establish.

"Now every major has an EMPIRE quote-unquote system, where they try to implement that," says CSH Management's Kenny Hamilton, who has had several clients work with EMPIRE over the years. "But it's not the same relationships; it kind of sounds like they're just trying to find the next quick thing that they can upstream to a major system, but you're really not doing artist development. At EMPIRE, that's what they do. They're patient with the artists, and if they see promise and they believe in it, then they put their all into it as well. It's often imitated but never duplicated."

As the industry started to shift toward the EMPIRE model, EMPIRE itself was moving toward the one used by major-label groups, incorporating A&R, marketing, PR, promotions and social media into its offerings on top of pure distribution and starting to provide label deals and joint ventures. In 2018, EMPIRE struck a nonexclusive deal with UMG to distribute select artist projects; in 2019, it added a vertical to handle original content, which now includes several high-traffic Instagram accounts and a music video department, and expanded into Nashville, the United Kingdom and Europe. By 2020, EMPIRE had started a merch operation by acquiring a majority stake in Top Drawer Merch/Electric Family, then officially announced a publishing division, which had already been informally part of the company for several years. The studio technically opened in 2019, but because of the pandemic and continued expansion and renovations, it is only now becoming the one-stop content shop that Ghazi had envisioned.

"I'm a practice-makes-perfect type of person," he says. "I always knew the intention was to be a label, but I knew I couldn't be a label without taking a lot of shots. If you want to be a great free-throw shooter, you've got

From left: Ghazi, Asake and Fireboy on Feb. 27 during EMPIRE's Africa writing camp in San Francisco.

ASAKE: MATTHEW FONG/COURTESY OF EMPIRE

to take a lot of shots, find your technique and the right approach."

The right approach, at this point, is there; the goal — a full suite of music and cultural offerings — within sight. All of which has brought the kind of attention Ghazi has instinctively shied away from over the years. The offers to sell, to divest, to assume the final form of what it means to be a Major Label in the Traditional Sense is not something he's interested in. He owns the company outright, has it rooted in his home city and has no investors or board of directors to answer to — only his staff of 200 around the world and, most importantly, his artists. Still, the questions and offers persist.

"I would call it a tug of war," he says. "I've always been a firm believer that attracting too much attention sometimes gets you off your A-game. But, I also understand the balance of, every once in a while, you've got to shine a spotlight on something for people to see the magic.

"It was always about autonomy; if you go to my office right now, behind my desk there's a sign on my floor, written in Arabic. It says, 'Freedom.' I just always wanted the freedom to just be my own man."

Ghazi

THE SUMMER OF 2016 was dominated by Drake's single "One Dance," featuring Wizkid and Kyla, which held the No. 1 spot on the Billboard Hot 100 for the entirety of June and July, making Wizkid the first Nigerian artist to chart on, let alone top, the tally. At the same time, EMPIRE made another subtle move, one that would pay off years later: getting into business with one of Nigeria's biggest talents, Olamide.

Today, the 34-year-old rapper, singer, songwriter, producer and YBNL Nation founder has cemented his legacy on his native continent. For nearly 15 years, he has been a prolific artist and executive, helping shape the sounds of hip-hop and Afrobeats, and growing into one of the pillars of modern West African music while championing and boosting a number of young artists along the way, through features or label deals.

"Olamide is almost like a street hero," says Phiona Okumu, Spotify's head of music, sub-Saharan Africa. "It's him understanding the best of American, Western hip-hop culture, but also understanding the grace and vibrancy of where he is from and bringing it together and making it so palatable that's been his main influence. He's able to spark a star, he's able to hear a sound, and he's able to make it go."

By 2016, streaming services began to slowly open on the continent. IFPI didn't even begin tracking revenue in Africa until the last few years. In 2019, South Africa ranked No. 31 among countries tracked by IFPI in recorded-music revenue, at $59.9 million; the entirety of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, lumped together, came in at No. 59, at $4.3 million. (IFPI has not released hard figures since.)

"While we were growing up in Africa, all an artist depended on was shows," says Mobolaji Kareem, EMPIRE's regional head of West Africa, as he stands in Studio C with YBNL Nation head of brand and talent management Alex Okeke and DJ Enimoney, Olamide's DJ and brother. "From 2010, 2011, until 2016, all of it was free music on SoundCloud, Audiomack. We dropped things on Twitter. Streaming money started coming around maybe 2016; if Apple Music was around in 2010, we'd be doing like a billion streams right now."

Olamide broke onto the scene in 2010, primarily as a rapper, mixing English and Yoruba, and signed to a label called Coded Tunes, through which he distributed music and made songs available as ringtones. In 2012, he left that label and launched YBNL Nation, distributing his own music through telcos, as was standard in Africa at the time, and YBNL

Olamide in the San Francisco studio on Feb. 20 during EMPIRE's Africa writing camp.

OLAMIDE: MATTHEW FONG/COURTESY OF EMPIRE

artists through Bolaji's Ingle Mind distribution company, which also handled music by the likes of Wizkid, Burna Boy and Tiwa Savage. Olamide signed rising artists such as Lil Kesh, Adekunle Gold and Viktoh while steadily putting out his own music and being a hands-on label executive. By 2016, Olamide was out of his telco deal and began working with Bolaji, who had started using EMPIRE's distribution framework to expand his artists' reach beyond Africa.

At the time, the two sides didn't know each other. EMPIRE was distributing around 500 projects a month, and Ghazi was more focused on building its label structure than dealing with distribution; Bolaji was working through an intermediary to release his artists' projects through the EMPIRE system. That was the state of affairs for several years until 2018 or 2019, when the numbers began to change. "The money kept getting so much every year. At some point, Ghazi just said, 'Fuck it, who is this boy from Africa? This artist that is making up to like $40,000, $50,000, $60,000 a month out of Africa with no marketing, no pitch, nothing?' " Bolaji says. "They had to fly down."

Ghazi remembers it a little differently. "One day, Tina [Davis, EMPIRE's vp of A&R] runs in my office and is like, 'Yo, there's this dude from Africa on the phone right now, and I don't know what he wants because he's screaming at me. You need to help me deal with this,' " he recalls. "So I get on the phone, and if I remember correctly, it was like a payment issue — something went wrong with their account, we didn't respond fast enough or whatever. We fixed it. And then right around that same time, Nima [Etminan, EMPIRE's COO] came into my office and was like, 'Man, I think we should go meet these people.' "

It was a fortuitous meeting — and a well-timed one. Ghazi and Etminan flew to Lagos, Nigeria, and met with Olamide, Bolaji and Okeke, who introduced them to the Nigerian music scene and some of its leading figures, including then-Universal Music Nigeria GM Ezegozie Eze. "Us being personally there was a big deal," Ghazi says. "Because most people were just sending out reps or just hiring somebody locally to deal with it. We were running around all week, concert to concert, festival to festival, visiting other people's houses; we went to Fela [Kuti]'s shrine; we were all over the place. We were learning about the country and the music infrastructure. And it was very gratifying that we were received the way we were received, like we're family. That made me go 10 times harder."

"Olamide didn't come to meet EMPIRE. EMPIRE came to meet Olamide," Bolaji stresses. "And that was how we started EMPIRE Africa, through YBNL. So one of the things I tell people is, 'The catalog for EMPIRE Africa sits on YBNL.' Because if YBNL wasn't making that much money, [EMPIRE] wasn't going to see Africa that early."

Within months, EMPIRE had hired Bolaji and Eze to run EMPIRE Africa, an informal entity that was officially incorporated and announced in 2022, with YBNL as its centerpiece. The timing, once again, was fortuitous: After the first seeds of a breakthrough with "One Dance," momentum had gradually built for a global Afrobeats movement, with artists like Burna Boy, Davido, Mr Eazi, Savage and Nasty C making gains on the *Billboard* charts year by year. But it was during the pandemic, just as EMPIRE was putting down roots in Lagos, that Afrobeats truly crossed over into the United States, with Wizkid's "Essence," featuring Tems, which ultimately peaked at No. 9 on the Hot 100 and ruled the R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay chart for 27 weeks.

"When things like this happen, it's almost like a domino effect — that sets off the labels, and they get interested and curious about who can be next in terms of what the sound is like," says Spotify's Okumu. "All of the major labels were in the space before EMPIRE, and all of them had the same interests, the same pursuits — they all wanted the next big African star. But EMPIRE focused on A&R, and that is incredibly important when you have an emerging genre. I feel like that was the win in the joint venture between EMPIRE and YBNL."

It has also been reflected in the numbers. In 2021, recorded-music revenue in sub-Saharan Africa grew 9.6%, according to IFPI, with ad-supported streaming revenue up 56.4%. That number exploded in 2022, with overall revenue up 34.7% — the only region globally with growth north of 30% — taking over as the fastest-growing region for recorded-music revenue in the world. IFPI opened its first African office in mid-2020, reflecting the continent's growing importance and potential, and all three major labels now have presences in West Africa and South Africa. In the United States, seven of the top 10 on-demand streaming songs Luminate classified under "world music" — which encompasses several African genres, as well as genres like K-pop — were by West African artists in 2022.

IFPI regional director of sub-Saharan Africa Angela Ndambuki says she expects that massive growth to continue at the same rate this year. "With the digital growth and the advances in technology and new platforms coming in, we're able to see the labels investing even more, and their presence in the region helps drive the development of those scenes," she says. "And that then creates a healthy music market."

In the summer of 2020, Fireboy came to San Francisco for the first time to record in the EMPIRE studio. The young Nigerian singer had signed to YBNL in late 2018 and released his debut album, *Laughter, Tears and Goosebumps*, in November 2019 through YBNL/EMPIRE, then a second, *Apollo*, the following year. "He came to just record for a few days or a week, and we brought in three or four different producers and writers, and he wasn't very used to having writers. He's used to doing all his own stuff," Davis recalls, sitting in the expansive Studio A. "So it was new for us because he hadn't recorded here,

Etminan

and it was new for him because he had never been to San Francisco."

"Peru" emerged from that session the following summer, with its lyric "I'm in San Francisco jammin'," and almost immediately took off in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. The remix with Sheeran was released on Christmas Eve 2021, which propelled it even further. "That record was a way for us to show people that we could break a record outside of Africa and make it larger than just a record for the club and for the diaspora," Davis says. "But what it taught the African team is that you don't give up on a hit. I think it just opened it up for people to recognize how much we care about it, and it also gave us a bar to reach."

EMPIRE has grown beyond its YBNL foundations in West Africa. Acts like Daniel, Wande Coal, BNXN, L.A.X., Navy Kenzo and Black Sherif on its roster are expanding the limits of the Afrobeats, *amapiano*, highlife, *fuji* and Afropop genres, among others, while the company also distributes Burna Boy in Africa. (Atlantic is Burna's label stateside, and Warner distributes his music outside of Africa.) And Asake, who officially signed to YBNL/EMPIRE in mid-2022, lit the Afrobeats world on fire with his debut album, *Mr. Money With the Vibe*. Released last October, it immediately topped the Spotify and Apple Music charts, and has accrued 197.5 million streams in the United States, according to Luminate. Meanwhile, streams for Asake, Fireboy and Olamide have grown more than 500% outside of Africa on Apple Music, which greatly over-indexes in African music streams compared with competitors, the company tells *Billboard*.

That doesn't mean EMPIRE has cornered the market. Wizkid, Davido, Tems and rising star Libianca are all signed to RCA in the United States; CKay is distributed by Warner in partnership with local indie label Chocolate City, while Omah Lay goes through Sire; UMG's Virgin distributes Rema's "Calm Down," while Larry Jackson's new venture, gamma, has its African distribution rights, and Def Jam just signed Gold. As the industry's attention has shifted to opportunities on the continent, the competition has gotten fierce — but EMPIRE's reputation has allowed it to keep building organically in the region. "EMPIRE's a family, and all the other labels are labels," says Okeke. "That's the difference."

Now EMPIRE's task is to build upon that success and keep expanding its dominion — not an easy task in a globalized climate sagging under the weight of an increasing amount of new music every day. The company has already established an operation covering the Middle East/North Africa, bringing on Spotify's Suhel Nafar to oversee it. It is also making inroads in South Africa and recently hired people in Tokyo to oversee efforts in the Asia-Pacific region and Brazil to begin developing a foothold in South America. In each new region, EMPIRE is looking to build on the model that worked so well in West Africa, making strategic hires based on partnerships with well-connected industry players in local markets rather than signing artists to fit a sound. And even as that old digital music industry 2.0 has long since drifted away from the Bay, relocating to the likes of L.A. and New York, EMPIRE has remained in San Francisco. "We've plotted a lot of dots on the map, and I want to plot more dots and create more connectivity, more brainpower," says Ghazi.

On a Thursday afternoon in mid-April, Ghazi pulls over to the side of the road to explain, over the phone, the next iteration of the vision. He's about to fly to Johannesburg, then drive to Botswana, then return to the Bay for a few days with his family before another trip down to Rio de Janeiro — around the world and back again. "When you watch those movies from 15, 20 years ago and they put a globe up on the screen and then they push a button, and all the lines fly around the globe and connect to all the different epicenters? It's kind of like that," he says.

Which is to say, the journey may have hit one zenith, but that has only established a new jumping-off point, a new foundation on which to build. "You're always trying to go to greater heights, right? Man makes it to the moon, now you want to make it to Mars," he says. "As long as we live limitless and we continue to chase ourselves rather than other people, I think that we'll be OK. We're already successful; this already looks like success. It's just, how do you breed more success?"

The answer? In the studio. After the plaque presentation in March, a half-dozen A&Rs and engineers piled back into Studio C to gush over the record that Fireboy made the night before, which has a first verse; an epic, soaring hook; and a second verse left open — maybe for a stateside collaborator, or a fellow Afrobeats star, or maybe for Fireboy himself to finish off. Pop star names are tossed around, and a particular alt-R&B singer is mentioned. But one A&R stands up indignantly, voice rising above the others: "Hang on, hang on, hang on," he says to quiet the crew before adding nearly incredulously: "Did Bob Marley get someone else to put a second verse on 'I Shot the Sheriff'? This is all you!" The feeling is euphoric, the room is filled with laughter, the possibilities endless. The beat comes back in: rewind, cut, play, forget about the time. The vibe is here; the night is far from over. b billboard

2023

COUNTRY POWER PLAYERS

Billboard's tenth annual Country Power Players issue will profile the people who have driven another solid year for country music in sales, streaming and publishing. This special feature will highlight those who have had the greatest impact in the genre, including recorded music, live entertainment, publishing and more in the past year.

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40 UNDER 40

The minds powering the live industry's post-shutdown resurgence — along with next-gen forces from Capitol Hill to the silver screen — highlight *Billboard*'s annual celebration of the industry's young leaders

Haley McCollister

President, MTG Nashville // Messina Touring Group

HALEY McCOLLISTER has had a busy spring: Taylor Swift and Ed Sheeran, two of the flagship artists promoted by AEG Presents affiliate Messina Touring Group, launched stadium tours just seven weeks apart. McCollister, president of Messina's Nashville office, joined Swift on the road for the opening weeks of her blockbuster The Eras Tour, which began March 17 — as she also readied the May 6 kickoff of the North American leg of Sheeran's Mathematics Tour.

"The past few weeks have been... wild," says McCollister, 35, exhaling deeply as she anticipates hopscotching between the two runs. Yet she also points out that because she's been through this exact daunting scenario before — when Sheeran and Swift had concurrent stadium treks in summer 2018 and finished at Nos. 1 and 2 on that year's Top 25 Tours tally, respectively, with a combined gross of over $740 million, according to Billboard Boxscore — she feels more prepared for the mega-selling madness. "Every tour is different, every artist is different," she says, "but knowing how much time management and advanced preparation is needed? That's really where the experience has played in for me."

For McCollister, who was promoted to her current role last August, professional longevity has eased the process of setting up the biggest stages in live music. After graduating from Clemson University in 2010, McCollister moved to Texas as a new Messina hire — helping to handle ticket requests for Swift's 2011 arena tour — and spent five years in Houston before moving to Nashville in 2015 to build up the company's Music City office. McCollister has only ever worked for founder and CEO Louis Messina and his company, and admits that growing from a college grad to a president role at the same place over the course of 12 years is an industry rarity. "With Louis, he would always say, 'You're in charge of your own destiny. What is it you want? I'll give you the resources to go after it,' " McCollister recalls. "And instead of just saying that, he really did it."

As McCollister kept asking for more responsibilities and taking on more tours, she embraced the quality-over-quantity deal structures of Messina Touring Group, whose heavyweight touring roster also includes George Strait, The Lumineers, Kenny Chesney and Eric Church. By not spreading itself too thin, Messina Touring Group has long promoted VIP artists with long-term goals — and since her promotion, McCollister has been tasked with more overarching growth initiatives for that clientele. "We only work with so many artists, we keep the teams we have on these tours relatively consistent, and when we have conversations, we're never talking about the next tour — we're talking about the next 10 years," McCollister says.

The past three years have been particularly tricky for promoters to navigate due to the pandemic. The sector experienced something of a soft relaunch in late 2021 and 2022 as COVID-19 hesitancies lingered, but now touring has fully roared back; this year, Beyoncé, Metallica, Morgan Wallen and more will pass through the same venues as Swift and Sheeran. "I cannot believe how many stadium tours there are," McCollister says. "It's insane to me that we're in a time where this many artists are headlining 50,000-plus [capacity] venues." While the stadium circuit might be less crowded in 2024 and beyond, McCollister predicts a trickle-down effect to the festival market, which she believes has been affected by the myriad of headliners routing their own tours this year. "Once everybody gets their own stadium headlining shows done, that's when I think we'll see new festivals pop up."

While McCollister is looking forward to a busy summer full of stadium singalongs and strategy sessions, she's also steeling herself for more external conversations about the live industry's hot-button issue: ticketing. The mid-November timing of Ticketmaster's Eras Tour presale fiasco — where the platform's online infrastructure couldn't handle the enormous ticket demand and bots, an experience which Swift described as "excruciating" in a letter to fans — resulted in McCollister fielding questions about concert tickets from family members at Thanksgiving.

Ultimately, McCollister believes the current attention on ticketing issues will help push the live industry forward — and she's excited about the possibility of real progress soon. "It's a headache now, because it's what's loud in terms of the feedback that artists are getting, but it's something that their fans have been dealing with for [a while]," she says. "So I feel like, while the willingness to pay attention and see what we can do about this is not completely new, there's more sincerity behind making an effort." —JASON LIPSHUTZ

Swift

From left: McCollister, Sheeran, Messina and MTG's Keena Cheatham.

Ed Sheeran
usbank stadium

MCCOLLISTER: AMANDA YOUNG. SWIFT: ETHAN MILLER/TAS23/GETTY IMAGES. SHEERAN: ADAM BETTCHER.

ABREU

ATAMIAN

BALDEN

BAXTER

Carlos Abreu

MUSIC AGENT // UTA

Just five years after booking Rosalía in clubs, "it's incredibly special to see her perform to raucous crowds across the world," says Abreu, 36, who, with UTA's Sam Kirby Yoh, orchestrated her 2022 world tour. The London-based executive also oversees European and Latin American booking for Bad Bunny, who sold over 900,000 tickets across Latin American stadiums last year. "I work with artists and their teams to develop their live careers by building strategies that are uniquely tailored to each individual vision," he says.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "Running a dive shop or dive boat operation. Scuba diving is my favorite hobby."

Joe Atamian

SENIOR VP // WASSERMAN MUSIC

Atamian, whose clients include Sturgill Simpson, Black Pumas, Blackberry Smoke and Noah Kahan, can easily pick his highlight of the past year: "As a die-hard [Chicago] Cubs fan, watching The Lumineers onstage at Wrigley Field in front of a sold-out crowd will be hard to top," the 39-year-old says of the band he has represented since its club days. And, as a member of Sound Future, a 501c3 organization bringing emerging climate technologies to live events, he's also committed to ensuring a sustainable future for the sector.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "A bartender at The Blue Coconut in Bocas del Toro, Panama."

Alana Balden

ARTIST MANAGER // FULL STOP MANAGEMENT

Balden, 34, manages Lizzo alongside Kevin Beisler and guided the "true multihyphenate" through a mammoth 2022, where she released her *Special* album; launched her Yitty clothing brand; created her Emmy-winning Amazon series, *Watch Out for the Big Grrrls*; released an HBO documentary and concert film; won record of the year at the Grammys; and, with Live Nation, donated $1 million from her first sold-out arena tour to Planned Parenthood and the National Network of Abortion Funds. Says Balden: "As managers, we touch every aspect of an artist's career, business and life, and it's our job to make an artist's vision come to fruition."

My favorite piece of merch I own is: "A concert T-shirt from Britney Spears' July 2000 *Oops!... I Did It Again* show at The Forum."

Cristina Baxter

PARTNER/AGENT // WME

Promoted to partner in April 2022, Baxter has spent more than a decade at WME booking clients such as Miley Cyrus, Kygo, Kali Uchis, Sofi Tukker, Ashnikko, Carly Rae Jepsen and Gryffin. The 35-year-old is especially "proud of the role we've played in helping Sofi Tukker," as well as 2022 accomplishments by Cyrus (headlining Lollapaloozas Chile, Brazil and Argentina), Kygo (selling out Madison Square Garden) and Jepsen (embarking on her biggest North American tour yet).

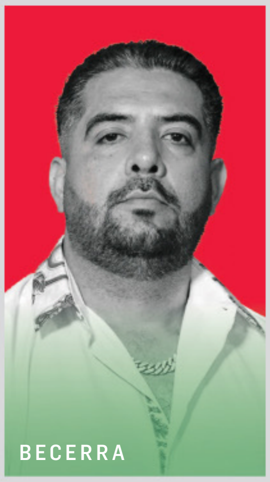
If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "[Working] in architecture and interior design. I love the intersection between visual art and our spaces, and how that impacts the way we live and our emotions."

José Becerra

COO // RANCHO HUMILDE ENTERTAINMENT

Earlier this year, Rancho Humilde-signed act Fuerza Regida notched its first No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Hot Latin Songs chart with the Grupo Frontera-assisted, *cumbia*-tinged "Bebe Dame" — which also became the band's first Billboard Hot 100 entry. "It's amazing being able to witness our Mexican artists receiving the recognition they deserve," says the L.A.-based Becerra, 38, who alongside business partner Jimmy Humilde, the indie label's CEO, has fostered a new generation of Mexican music acts such as Fuerza Regida, Junior H and Natanael Cano.

The best concert I've ever seen is: "Los Bukis, when they reunited."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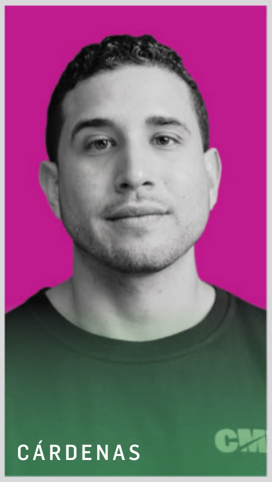

CÁRDENAS

Danny Bell

SENIOR VP/TALENT BUYER // GOLDENVOICE

At Goldenvoice's Bay Area office, Bell runs booking, oversees marketing and strategy, and personally books local one-offs (including arena shows), San Francisco's Warfield Theater and Frost Amphitheater in Palo Alto, Calif., where Goldenvoice has presented shows as exclusive contemporary music booker by artists from Bob Weir to Joji since the venue's 2019 reopening. All five festivals that the 34-year-old has booked and produced for the company — San Francisco's dance-focused Portola 2022 (which he also conceived), three years of Porter Robinson's Second Sky Festival and Day N Vegas 2021, where Kendrick Lamar did a one-time career-spanning set that Bell calls "epic" — sold out.

The best advice I've received is: "Don't be an asshole and do a good job."

Anders Borge

GM // 88RISING

Borge, 36, has worked with founder and CEO Sean Miyashiro since 88rising's 2015 launch and says the label applies "the talent management perspective to all aspects of what we do." That includes marketing, A&R, publishing, synch and merchandise — as well as touring and live events, which enjoyed a "milestone" 2022: 88rising's Head in the Clouds festival debuted outside the United States (in Manila, Philippines, and Jakarta, Indonesia), it became the first label to boast its own Coachella slot, and artists Joji, Niki and Jackson Wang mounted "breakout" tours. Next up: HITC's New York expansion in May.

My favorite piece of merch I own is: "The jean jacket we printed onsite at 88's first roster show at the Shrine in L.A. in 2018."

Alexander Cárdenas

DIRECTOR OF TOURING // CÁRDENAS MARKETING NETWORK

Cárdenas oversees and manages the touring and media departments for CMN — ranked third on *Billboard*'s 2022 year-end Top Promoters chart — which includes ticketing, talent negotiations and touring operations. Coming off a year where he managed Bad Bunny's record-breaking stadium tour in the United States and Latin America, and added Feid and Christian Nodal to CMN's roster, Cárdenas, 32, notes regional Mexican touring's growth, calling it a "testament to the power of digital marketing and social media."

The best advice I've received is: "Never assume," from CMN CEO (and his father) Henry Cárdenas. "Things move quickly and are constantly changing, so taking the time to reconfirm doubts will always save you a lot of headache along the way."

ABREU: COURTESY OF UTA. ATAMIAN: LINDSEY KANES. BALDEN: LAUREN DESBERG. BAXTER: TRISHA HARRISON. BECERRA: RANCHO HUMILDE. BELL: MISHA VLADIMIRKIY. BORGE: DANI LEIGH. CÁRDENAS: CHRIS COSTOSO.

DEROCHE

DUDOWSKY

GOODMAN

HAHN

Brandon DeRoche

CEO // PROPELLER

These are busy times for DeRoche, who created nonprofit platform Propeller to help artists partner with organizations devoted to issues like LGBTQ+ equality, racial justice, climate change and reproductive rights. Over the last year, Propeller, which incentivizes cause-related actions with a sweepstakes model for coveted tickets, merch and more, surpassed "$5 million raised and 8 million actions taken on the platform," the 39-year-old says, citing campaigns with artists including Justin Bieber and Lizzo; festivals such as Bonnaroo and Outside Lands; and Propeller's first venue partnership, with Denver-area Red Rocks Amphitheatre.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "Writing code."

Seth Dudowsky

HEAD OF MUSIC // NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

As the NFL's first head of music, a role he assumed in 2022 after nearly a decade with the league, Dudowsky's role encompasses booking, staging, broadcast integration and show execution for musical performances at NFL events — including the Super Bowl halftime show, where he's the league's executive-in-charge and works closely with executive producer Roc Nation. Performances like Rihanna's memorable Super Bowl LVII set in February "are changing the future of how live broadcasts and musical performances can look, how they sound and what they feel like," says Dudowsky, 35.

The best advice I've received is: "Don't fuck this up," from "mentor and industry legend" Ron Semiao, when given the opportunity to oversee Super Bowl entertainment.

Brandon Goodman

CO-FOUNDER/CO-OWNER // BEST FRIENDS MUSIC

Since Goodman co-founded Best Friends Music with Danny Rukasin in 2019, they've built a tight-knit team to support a roster that features superstars like Billie Eilish and FINNEAS and emerging talents like Mimi Webb and Blake Rose. Today, Goodman, 38, is most excited that artists "can be entrepreneurial and explore new ways to expand their brand," as Eilish has done with her Nike deal and own perfume line. "My role is to guide the careers of my clients while being an advocate to help them achieve their goals," he says.

The best concert I've ever seen is: Billie Eilish's 2022 Coachella headlining set, which was "a career highlight."

Aram Hahn

HTS BUSINESS STRATEGY DEPARTMENT LEAD // HYBE

As K-pop's global live clout rapidly grows, Hahn, 36, has been integral in the concert strategies of major HYBE draws including BTS, Tomorrow X Together, Seventeen and Enhypen. Following a stint at Live Nation Korea, where she planned Korean artists' global tours and foreign artists' Korean concerts, the Seoul-based executive joined HYBE in early 2019, ultimately leading a concert business division that made HYBE No. 8 on *Billboard*'s year-end Top Promoters chart in 2022 and prompted her to assume a new role in April that encompasses concerts and other HYBE business activities.

The best concert I've ever seen is: Adele in 2016 "had me laughing and crying throughout."

Mari Davies

Vp of talent and booking // Live Nation Urban

IN JUNIOR HIGH school, Mari Davies would use her father's department store credit card to buy concert tickets from the store's Ticketmaster kiosk — and then sell them to friends for a minimal markup.

"It was just a couple of bucks," Davies, 36, says with a laugh. "And my dad was aware. In hindsight, I'm like, 'Oh, shit. I was making money off of concerts since I was a kid.' "

Now, the Los Angeles native and graduate of St. John's University in Queens (where J. Cole was a classmate) has come full circle, joining Live Nation Urban last year as vp of talent and booking. Playing an integral role in the company's festival curation, Davies helms a slate that includes LNU's partnership with the Washington, D.C.-based Broccoli City Music Festival (Brent Faiyaz, Jazmine Sullivan and Lil Uzi Vert will headline 2023's 10th anniversary); Philadelphia's Roots Picnic (topped this year by Ms. Lauryn Hill and Diddy & The Roots); Park Jams, a Central Park concert of hip-hop legends celebrating Juneteenth; and Atlanta's ONE Musicfest.

Upon joining LNU, Davies formally established its new touring department "to build our hard-ticket business," putting on emerging African artist Rema's club run in 2022; LNU's 2023 tours include Ari Lennox, Jill Scott, dvsn, Davido and LL COOL J's first arena trek in 30 years. She's also especially proud of curating and marketing Mary J. Blige and Pepsi's inaugural Strength of a Woman Festival and Summit on Mother's Day weekend in 2022 featuring Chaka Khan, City Girls and Blige herself; the fest returned to Atlanta May 11-14, planned again by the all-female team Davies calls a "special sisterhood."

Prior to LNU, Davies spent 10 years as an ICM agent, representing R&B/hip-hop clients such as Kelly Rowland, Kodak Black, A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie, Davido and Teyana Taylor. At the agency, she was also a founding member of Diversify ICM and Next Gen Femme, the mentorship program affiliated with Live Nation joint venture Femme It Forward.

When Davies transitioned to LNU, she says she was "seeing the shift in trends. A lot of artists were doing tour deals direct, whether with Live Nation or AEG." Today, drawing on relationships forged at ICM, she approaches her job "almost like a hybrid agent," she explains. "Managers still call me and, of course, I loop in the agents. I'm able to connect with all of them because I came from a management and agency background."

Her vision moving forward "is all about scale." That means strategically building out LNU's touring and festival divisions while identifying new partnerships and properties. Davies, whose late mother was from Cameroon, also wants to expand further into gospel/inspirational and African music.

And the LNU executive continues to seek ways to increase diversity in the live sector.

"For me, it's important to hire, work with and represent all people of color," says Davies. "Especially women, because I haven't seen enough change, enough new faces or enough women being retained in positions within the live touring and agency space." —GAIL MITCHELL

DEROCHE: TABITHA BROOKE. DUDOWSKY: BEN LIEBENBERG/NFL. GOODMAN: MATT SALACUSE. HAHN: ARAM HAHN. DAVIES: JEREMY DAVID CREATIVE.

Natalie Hayden

SENIOR VP, FILM MUSIC // UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Whether pitching and selecting songs, hiring and interfacing with score composers or helping make original songs happen, Hayden fulfills music-related needs for Universal films. Last year, she ensured the award-winning *Tár*’s authenticity, hiring Cate Blanchett’s conducting coach and choosing music selections with director Todd Field; on the opposite end of the cinema spectrum, she secured Karol G for *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*’s original end-credits song. “It has been incredible to see film and TV become such a destination for music talent,” says Hayden, 36.

The best concert I’ve ever seen is: “Yeah Yeah Yeahs and LCD Soundsystem at the [Hollywood] Bowl in 2018. As an elder millennial, that really got me!”

Mary Catherine Kinney

HEAD OF ARTIST PARTNERSHIPS // SPOTIFY

Kinney leads a U.S.-based team that handles artist and manager relationships, which in 2022 included partnerships with acts from Bad Bunny to Taylor Swift to Blackpink. Based in Nashville, Kinney, 35, is also proud Spotify recognized Zach Bryan’s star potential early, including him on playlists starting in 2020 and naming him Spotify’s first country RADAR US artist ahead of his 2022 album, *American Heartbreak*.

If I wasn’t working in the music business, I’d be: “Owning an interior design studio or an antique shop. I love what I do, but trust me, no one does antiquing like me.”

Michael Lewan

SENIOR DIRECTOR, ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC POLICY // THE RECORDING ACADEMY

Lewan’s efforts on Capitol Hill shape policies affecting the entire music business. In 2022, his state policy work helped pass California’s Decriminalizing Artistic Expression Act, which limits how song lyrics can be used as trial evidence — “the first bill of its kind in the U.S.,” the 36-year-old says. Recently, Lewan and the academy joined other organizations to launch the Human Artistry CampAIgn to “collectively look out for the impact on the human creating the music” as artificial intelligence develops.

Ten years ago, I was: “Not in the music industry! I was getting my career started in D.C., and I was working in renewable energy advocacy.”

Milana Lewis

CO-FOUNDER/CEO // STEM DISINTERMEDIA

“The music industry’s financial framework is antiquated and unreliable,” says Lewis, 35, who launched Stem in 2015 to provide high-level distribution and services to indie artists and labels. Today, the company also offers flexible financing options for independent clients and transparent royalty accounting so artists and their col-

Justin “Meezy” Williams

Founder/Manager // Meezy Entertainment

BEFORE Justin “Meezy” Williams became 21 Savage’s manager in 2015, he was a well-known party promoter in Atlanta. “Everybody in Atlanta knew me,” he recalls. “I knew Future before he blew up. I knew Migos before they blew up. I knew 2 Chainz as Tity Boi, and I threw all the parties.” But despite his impressive Rolodex, his future wasn’t clear until he professionally connected with Savage.

“I’ve known him since he was 12. We grew up on the same side [of town],” says the 34-year-old owner of Meezy Entertainment and president of Savage’s imprint, Slaughter Gang. “When I was in high school, he used to be on the street when I walked home from school. I just had a good reputation as a party promoter, and that’s what linked us doing this together. It made sense. He had the real shit, and I had the club shit.”

Since Williams partnered with Savage, now 30, the formidable rapper has notched 14 Hot 100 top 10 singles, including two No. 1s, and three Billboard 200 chart-toppers, including last November’s *Her Loss*, a collaborative project with Drake. But while Williams had heard rumblings that the duo, whose previous collaborations included the 2022 Hot 100 No. 1 song “Jimmy Cooks,” were working on more music together, he didn’t press the “very private” Savage for details.

“I heard pieces, like the skeleton of ‘Rich Flex,’ ” he recalls. “I knew where it was going, but I never heard the whole album until it came out. We let them do what they needed to do.” Williams worked with Drake’s longtime manager, Future the Prince, on a rollout that included spoof appearances on NPR’s *Tiny Desk* and *The Howard Stern Show*.

Williams looks forward to seeing Savage and Drake together this summer when their It’s All a Blur Tour plays arenas in major U.S. markets, including seven New York shows in July. Noting that they’re “still building out creative about how [the stage setup is] going to look,” Williams is confident that now is the perfect time for Drake and Savage to tour together. “In anybody’s imagination, they would’ve wanted this tour,” he says. “Sometimes, give the people what they want.”

But he’s clear-eyed about the competition Savage faces in this year’s crowded concert market and beyond. “You have to give them an experience,” Williams adds. “You have to be a showman at this point or have some personality that people gravitate to. You can’t just lean on these shows. Your business has to be right.”

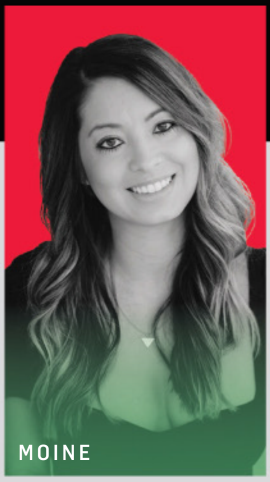
Through Meezy Entertainment and Slaughter Gang, Williams — who describes himself as part of “this new generation of managers; we do everything” — is applying lessons learned from Savage’s success to other clients. “[We’re] just really building up the artists that we have,” he says, referencing 21 Lil Harold, SG Tip and producer Kid Hazel. “Really establishing the company outside of you knowing the name because of 21 Savage and really getting hands-on feeling like we are creating something.”

—CARL LAMARRE

HAYDEN: AARON HAXTON. KINNEY: MARY CAROLINE RUSSELL. LEWAN: PAUL MORIGI/COURTESY OF THE RECORDING ACADEMY. LEWIS: PATRICK STRATTNER. WILLIAMS: CHIMGORNUM "SIGGY" SIGMUND.

MCKAY

MCTAGGART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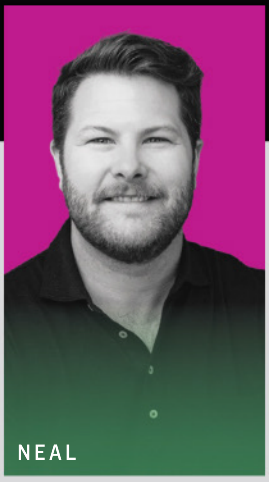

NEAL

laborators know "how much their project is earning and get paid in a predictable and streamlined manner."
My favorite piece of merch I own is: "I started buying merch at every show I went to when I was pregnant for my daughter to wear when she's older. We have merch from Morgan Wallen, Harry Styles, Paramore, Elton John and bbno$, to name a few."

David McKay

GM, ARTIST SERVICES // SOFAR SOUNDS; CEO // SEATED
McKay works "to help artists connect with their fans, sell more tickets and generate more revenue at every stage in their careers" at ticketing startup Seated, which he co-founded in 2017, and as GM of artist services at Sofar Sounds, which acquired Seated in 2021. McKay, 37, oversees services for the 20,000-plus artists who play Sofar concerts annually while still leading Seated, which recently facilitated presale ticketing and registrations for Harry Styles, Jack Harlow, Brandi Carlile and Dead & Company, among others.
The best concert I've ever seen is: John Mayer more than two decades ago at St. Louis club Mississippi Nights — "I immediately fell in love with live music."

Avery McTaggart

MANAGING PARTNER // TBA AGENCY
In the last year, pandemic-era upstart TBA doubled its staff and opened New York and Los Angeles offices — growth that McTaggart, as part of the agency's founding team, helped spearhead while overseeing his own 45-artist roster, which includes Ethel Cain, Unknown Mortal Orchestra and Yaeji. "The live industry has had to adjust and learn how to manage rapid growth into longevity," says McTaggart, 37, "and I believe that's best led by a clear, shared vision between artists and their teams."
If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "Running a hotel with a great restaurant."

Becky Moine

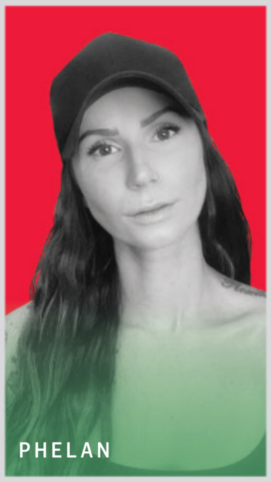
SENIOR TOUR DIRECTOR // LIVE NATION
Moine, a 10-year Live Nation veteran who says she acts as "a one-stop shop" for managers, agents and other stakeholders for touring aspects from marketing to ticketing to operations, worked on last year's Red Hot Chili Peppers and The Weeknd stadium runs, two of 2022's 10 highest-grossing tours. The electronic music fan is intently watching as EDM acts like ODESZA and Rüfüs Du Sol increasingly frequent amphitheaters and arenas. "The future for artists in this space is massive," says Moine, 33.
The best concert I've ever seen is: "Rüfüs Du Sol with Fred again.. at the Gorge last summer was legendary."

Austin Neal

FOUNDER/CO-HEAD // THE NEAL AGENCY
It has been quite a year-and-a-half for Neal. He launched Nashville-based Neal Agency in December 2021 (shortly after departing WME), with clients including Morgan Wallen, HARDY and Chase Rice, and this January added Adi Sharma as co-head and rising star Bailey Zimmerman to its roster. As Wallen embarks on his first stadium tour, featuring double plays in many markets, and HARDY on his first arena tour this year, country's "expansion into international markets" excites Neal — but the 36-year-old is concerned about ticketing: "From scalpers to fees, we need to find better solutions."
The best concert I've ever seen is: "The War on Drugs at Red Rocks."

PARKER

PAZ


PHELAN

PRESTON

Stephen Parker

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR // NATIONAL INDEPENDENT VENUE ASSOCIATION
Named NIVA's executive director in January, Parker has a background in policy, including as a Country Music Association adviser, that has primed him to lead the group that secured $16 billion in federal funds in 2020 and continues to advocate for independent venues and promoters. "Independent live entertainment's time has come to finally be recognized as an economic and cultural powerhouse for national and local economies," says Parker, 36.
My favorite piece of merch I own is: "Vinyl of Vulfpeck's *Live at Madison Square Garden*. I listened to it over and over in 2020 because it was a perfectly preserved moment of live music."

Gilbert Paz

VP OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS // LOUD AND LIVE
Paz oversaw business operations for the nearly 400 tours, concerts and festivals Loud and Live produced last year, including negotiating with superstars like Camilo and Carlos Vives, and leading booking for Miami's first country festival, Country Bay. At just 30, he has already witnessed explosive growth in market size and ticket sales, especially in the Latin market — which, he says, "is now mainstream. We are doubling the amount of markets in most of our tours."
My favorite piece of merch I own is: "The Jacksons' *Victory* tour program book from 1984 that my mom handed down to me when I decided to pursue a career in the entertainment industry."

Amanda Phelan

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF TALENT/BUYER // DANNY WIMMER PRESENTS
In her first year filling the DWP talent buyer role Gary Spivack previously held, Phelan, 33, curated lineups and negotiated booking deals for several of the company's 2022 festivals, including massive hard-rock events like Sonic Temple in Columbus, Ohio, and Aftershock in Sacramento, Calif. As Phelan sees it, it's an exciting time to be a talent buyer: "All genre barriers are off the table, leaving room for creativity and fresh spin on everything."
The best advice I've received is: "Be unapologetically yourself, and never stay at a company that doesn't value you," from grandfather John Harvey.

Noah Preston

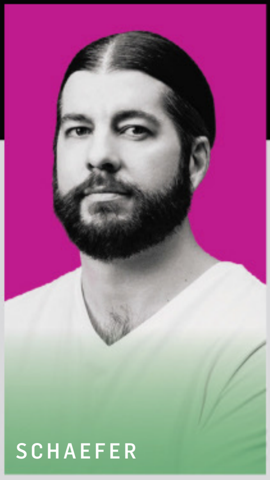
EXECUTIVE VP OF A&R // DEF JAM
As Def Jam's senior-ranking A&R executive, Preston, 34, says his job is to "understand the artist's vision and help them make it come to life" — and with that guiding principle, he has scored major wins, from developing Jhené Aiko's career (and handling A&R for her Grammy-nominated 2020 album, *Chilombo*) to signing acclaimed producers DJ Dahi and Hit-Boy as artists to helping YG score a Rhythmic Airplay No. 1 last year with "Toxic."
Ten years ago, I was: "Still completing my undergraduate degree at Loyola Marymount, while also just completing my first year as a full-time A&R at Def Jam."

MCKAY: SETH DINNERMAN. MCTAGGART: JOSH MULDER. MOINE: STEPHANIE IP. NEAL: HUNTER BERRY. PARKER: RAMON ATALA. PAZ: IVAN APFEL. PHELAN: COURTESY OF AMANDA PHELAN. PRESTON: ALBERT RINCON.

PUTNEY

RODRIGUEZ

SAVAGE


SCHAEFER

Marissa Putney

VP, INTERNATIONAL LABEL MANAGEMENT // THE ORCHARD

At the helm of The Orchard's International Label Management division, Putney, 37, drives "cooperation and meticulous execution of campaign strategy" across more than 46 offices globally. She has overseen campaigns for acts from Bad Bunny to BTS, and recent accomplishments include working "hand in hand" with Rimas on Eladio Carrión's *3MEN2 KBRN* rollout and collaborating with Human Re Sources and its artist RAYE, whose success Putney says she's "humbled" by. "The level of appreciation people have for music today from another corner of the globe is really profound," Putney adds.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "Working in the nonprofit field."

Dom Rodriguez

SENIOR VP/HEAD OF SM ENTERTAINMENT USA // SM ENTERTAINMENT

A 13-year veteran of SM Entertainment, Rodriguez has overseen the company's North American operations since 2017, making him instrumental in K-pop's continued growth stateside. "K-pop is here to stay and is a part of the global pop fabric and culture," says Rodriguez, 39, who has shepherded stars like SuperM, NCT 127 and aespa. "We continue to push the boundaries of K-pop and expand into various areas of the U.S. industry, such as fashion, film and television, and more."

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "A baseball coach — my whole life has always revolved around music and baseball."

Hazel Savage

VP OF MUSIC INTELLIGENCE // SOUNDCLOUD

After working at tech and music's intersection with companies including Shazam and Pandora, Savage co-founded AI company Musiio, which has helped over 75 companies (including Sony, Downtown and Hipgnosis) tag tracks and provide more descriptive musical metadata. Last year, the 39-year-old sold Musiio to SoundCloud, where she still runs Musiio sales and has spearheaded SoundCloud's integrations with services like 7digital, LyricFind, ACR Cloud and Tuned Global "in the spirit of creating a better ecosystem for metadata."

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "A long-distance lorry driver. I love driving, and I could listen to classic rock radio all day!"

Cameron Schaefer

CEO // VINYL ME, PLEASE

In 2013, the former U.S. Air Force captain pivoted to selling music as part of Vinyl Me, Please's founding team. By mid-2021, the company had 80,000 mail-order customers for its premium vinyl releases, and it keeps growing: In April, it opened a 14,000-square-foot Denver pressing plant and launched Vinyl Me, Parton, a record-of-the-month reissue series devoted to Dolly Parton classics. "We occupy a small corner of the industry universe, but one that's vitally important to the heart and soul of it," says Schaefer, 39.

Ten years ago, I was: "Flying MQ-1 Predators out of Creech Air Force Base [in] Nevada."

Rebecca Schwartz

TALENT PRODUCER // *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*

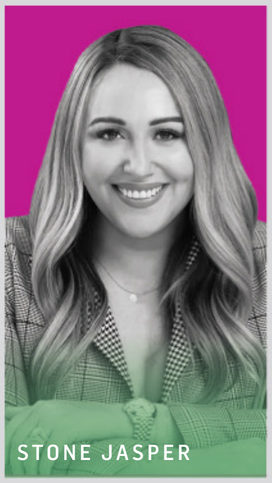
If *SNL*'s musical guests over the last year — including Rosalía, Brandi Carlile, Japanese Breakfast and Steve Lacy, along with host-performers Jack Harlow and Megan Thee Stallion — have seemed particularly diverse, high-profile and relevant, credit Schwartz, 35, who co-heads "a team of extremely intelligent people with a broad spectrum of tastes" ensuring the long-running show "can represent all types of genres." Schwartz also produced NBC's *Miley's New Year's Eve Party*, a special stacked with performances by David Byrne, Dolly Parton and, of course, Cyrus herself.

Ten years ago, I was: "In the infancy of my Lana Del Rey fanaticism."

SCHWARTZ

SEXTON

SIMON


STONE JASPER

Andrew Sexton

PRINCIPAL, LABEL RELATIONS // AMAZON MUSIC

As Amazon Music's principal of label relations, Sexton helps artists reach the masses — which has recently entailed work with the "most exciting thing happening right now" in the industry: the integration of sports and music. Sexton, 38, curated the lineup for *Amazon Music Live*, launched in October to complement Amazon Prime's *Thursday Night Football* broadcasts, booking host 2 Chainz and acts including Lil Baby, A$AP Rocky, Lil Wayne and Megan Thee Stallion. Sexton has also led Amazon's marketing plans and rollouts surrounding album launches by Taylor Swift, The Weeknd, Post Malone and more.

If I wasn't working in the music business, I'd be: "Trying to figure out how to be in the music business."

Ian Simon

CO-FOUNDER/CEO // STRANGELOOP STUDIOS

Since Simon co-founded Strangeloop in 2015, the boutique production company has provided concert visuals for Flying Lotus, Zeds Dead, Lil Nas X — and, in April, Blackpink's headlining Coachella set. Strangeloop also ventured into the metaverse with virtual-character studio Spirit Bomb and launched emerging technology division SLS Projects. "My role is to nurture the insane creativity of our team and the artists we work with, and then get out of the way and let the magic unfold," says Simon, 33.

Ten years ago, I was: "On my first arena tour with Kendrick [Lamar], opening for Kanye [West] on the *Yeezus* tour."

Caitlin Stone Jasper

PARTNER/HEAD OF ACTIVISM // ACTIVIST ARTISTS MANAGEMENT

The youngest of Activist's six partners, Stone Jasper equates management to a circular target, with artists as the bull's-eye and managers the first ring, being "the first line of defense and the [collectors] of information from every other ring [that] represents another part of the team." The 34-year-old, who began her career with a seven-year stint on Zac Brown Band's management team, now day-to-day manages Michael Franti and Brittney Spencer — and serves as Activist's head of activism, spearheading partnerships with organizations such as Everytown for Gun Safety and HeadCount.

My favorite piece of merch I own is: "An oversize Bruce Springsteen shirt from his 1999 tour gifted to me by a dear friend. It gets packed in every suitcase I carry."

PUTNEY: JACK RUDDER. RODRIGUEZ: COURTESY OF DOM RODRIGUEZ. SAVAGE: ALISON EMERICK. SCHAEFER: PAUL MILLER. SCHWARTZ: MARY ELLEN MATTHEWS/NBC. SEXTON: TRACY SEXTON. SIMON: COURTESY OF IAN SIMON. STONE JASPER: RICH POLK.

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Christian Coffey

Tour director // Coffey Black

EVERY YEAR, Killer Mike is one of the first people who calls Christian Coffey to wish him a happy birthday.

"We all have a text chat that's, you know, talking shit to each other like brothers," says Coffey, 37, of Mike and his Run the Jewels partner, El-P. "I was at El-P's wedding, and I know all Mike's kids."

For the last eight years, anyone who has been to a Run the Jewels show has witnessed Coffey's work in action — and the reason why he has built such a trusting relationship with the hip-hop duo, among other high-profile clients. Coffey runs Coffey Black, a five-person company that provides comprehensive touring services to help artists execute their visions on the road. This spring, he was tasked with bringing Frank Ocean's elaborate vision to life as set producer for the star's headlining Coachella performance, which included extensive, last-minute production modifications (such as eliminating an onstage ice rink) after the artist sustained an ankle injury in the days leading up to the show. (Ocean canceled his second-weekend Coachella set.) While Coffey has performed the traditional tour manager role (ensuring logistics for band and crew run smoothly) for acts such as Run the Jewels, OK Go and Miike Snow previously, his current work as a tour director is much broader.

"A Monotone [Inc.] or a Red Light [Management] has people overseeing a touring department," he explains. "With a lot of independent managers or mid-level managers — companies that may not have it — I effectively started working to make myself and my company their touring department."

Early in tour planning, artists and their teams enlist Coffey Black to assist in virtually every aspect of hitting the road. Budgeting, routing, logistical planning, crew hiring, vendor contracting, business management and account reconciliation are among the components Coffey collaborates on with managers, agents, lawyers and other members of artists' teams, and recent clients include A$AP Rocky, Childish Gambino, Clairo and Dermot Kennedy. When touring resumed in 2021, Coffey began working with pgLang's roster, including Kendrick Lamar, whom he helped navigate lingering COVID-19 protocols and labor shortages for a successful 2022 world tour, along with running point for the rapper's major televised appearances on *Saturday Night Live* and the Super Bowl halftime show.

"One of the things that I tell every client whenever I meet with them is, ultimately, my job is to work to bring your creative vision to life so that you just have to worry about the actual creative," Coffey says. "The how-it-gets-done is what we handle."

—ERIC RENNER BROWN

Russ Tannen

PRESIDENT // DICE

From DICE's New York headquarters, Tannen led the mobile ticketer to its strongest year yet in 2022, with over 55,000 artists and 10,000 venues and promoters using the platform to sell tickets, including the legendary Newport Jazz and Folk festivals, Primavera Sound and Brooklyn club Avant Gardner. "Ticketing has historically been a frustrating and painful experience for fans, and it has reached a breaking point," says Tannen, 36, of the sector. "We must prioritize the fan experience if we want to grow the industry."

The best advice I've received is: "Never send an angry email," from DICE founder and CEO Phil Hutcheon.

Chris Thomas

MANAGING PARTNER // RANGE MEDIA PARTNERS

Thomas began managing Jack Harlow in 2016 and took the rapper with him when he joined management startup Range in 2021. Today, Thomas, 35, helps the superstar juggle acting (starring in the *White Men Can't Jump* reboot and hosting *Saturday Night Live*), investing (in plant-based recovery beverage Phocus) and touring (selling out arenas as one of rap's hottest new headliners). Management is most exciting, Thomas says, "when we take the tiniest seed of an idea and grow it together, with a client, into a massive tree."

Ten years ago, I was: "Preparing to graduate law school while planning the first album rollout for Houndmouth, my very first client. I never signed up for the bar exam."

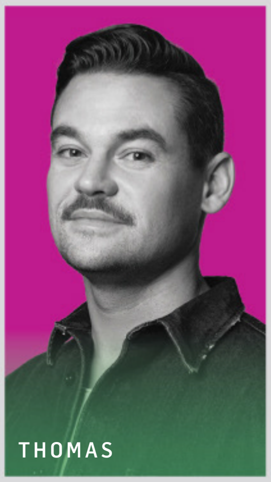
Ryan Thomson

MUSIC AGENT // CAA

Thomson identifies "the emergence of new niche subgenres and their corresponding, massively engaged fan bases" as one of the most exciting developments in touring — and the versatile CAA agent specializes in booking such artists across the musical spectrum, from indie-pop's Clairo to alt-R&B's keshi to rage rap's Playboi Carti, whom Thomson, 34, has helped quickly become an in-demand festival and arena headliner.

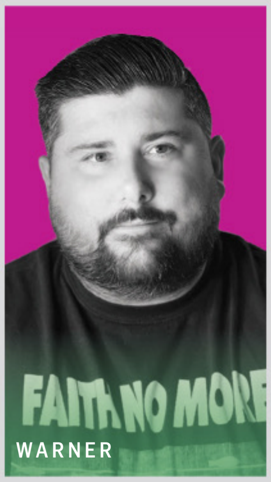
The best concert I've ever seen is: Frank Ocean at Philadelphia's Union Transfer in 2012. "Everyone in that room knew we were witnessing a generational talent and master of his craft."

TANNEN



THOMAS

THOMSON



WARNER

Bryan Warner

SENIOR MANAGER, TOUR MERCHANDISE // WARNER MUSIC EXPERIENCE

Touring has returned to full force post-pandemic shutdown, and fans aren't just watching their favorites perform — they're also hitting the merchandise tables. "Tour merch sales are at an all-time high," says Warner, 39, who has 20 years' experience managing day-to-day merch logistics for artists and now leads the WMX team that handles "literally everything A-Z for merch on the road" for a bevy of acts ranging from Muse to Jack Harlow to Paramore.

Ten years ago, I was: "On tour with Fall Out Boy for their *Save Rock and Roll* tour cycle." ■

CONTRIBUTORS

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METHODOLOGY

Nominations for *Billboard*'s executive lists open no less than 150 days in advance of publication, and a link is sent to press representatives by request before the nomination period. (Please email thom.duffy@billboard.com for inclusion on the email list for nomination links and to obtain an editorial calendar.) *Billboard*'s 40 Under 40 list was chosen by editors from selected industry sectors, based on factors including, but not limited to, nominations by peers, colleagues and superiors. This year's list emphasized the live sector and its executives. In addition to information requested with nominations, editors consider industry impact as measured by metrics including, but not limited to, chart, sales and streaming performance as measured by Luminate and social media impressions using data available as of March 21.

COFFEY: MATTHEW WARDENAAR. TANNEN: DICE. THOMAS: KINSEY BALL. THOMSON: COURTESY OF RYAN THOMSON. WARNER: CARLY HOFELDT.

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Universal Music Group's Women in Tech Roundtable at Music Biz 2022 in Nashville.

THE MUSIC BUSINESS ASSOCIATION REACHES OUT

On the eve of the annual Music Biz conference in Nashville, organization president Portia Sabin describes its efforts to serve a wider scope of the industry than ever

BY GEOFF MAYFIELD

WHEN EXECUTIVES from across the United States and international markets convene in Nashville May 15-18 for the Music Biz 2023 conference, they will connect with a trade organization widening its reach, with a leader boasting credentials that are uncommon in the music industry.

Portia Sabin, who became Music Business Association president in September 2019, brings to her role a Columbia University doctorate in anthropology and education and savvy that she gained from a subsequent 13 years as president of the respected independent label Kill Rock Stars and eight years as host of music business podcast *The Future of What*.

It's no wonder that Sabin has cultivated an esteemed fan club of music industry professionals, including the heads of other trade groups.

"Because of her background and her personality, she's got analytical and creative skills to put fresh ideas out there, and she's not afraid to push the envelope," says Mitch Glazier, chairman/CEO of the RIAA.

"She remains focused on educating and improving this business, pushing for growth and inclusion while helping others to navigate the challenges that come with never-ending technological and economic change," says Michael Huppe, president/CEO of SoundExchange. "I have a tremendous amount of respect for Portia as a strong and insightful voice in the music industry."

Highlights of this year's Music Biz conference will include four days of panels and workshops, keynote addresses by Kobalt founder and chairman Willard Ahdritz and leaders of the Black Music Action Coalition, as well as the second Bizzy Awards to recognize companies and individuals who are making a difference in improving the global industry (see nominees, page 68). The 2022 Music Biz drew over 2,100 attendees from across some 750 companies, with 8% of participants coming from outside the United States.

Sabin

"Running a label made me get very interested in the business of the music industry," Sabin says of the road that led her to her Music Business Association role. "I was also on the board of A2IM [the American Association of Independent Music] for 12 years, on the board of the RIAA for a couple years, on the Recording Academy Board of Governors in the Pacific Northwest for six years and I also started a podcast about the music industry in 2014, so I had a lot of interest in the business itself.

"It's a fascinating industry," Sabin continues. "There's a lot to know, and it's also one of those weird ones where everybody thinks it's easy from the outside until you get involved in it. We really saw that in the tech boom, starting about 10, 12 years ago, when all these tech people came into our sector saying, 'I don't know what your problem is. We can make lots of money,' and then one by one they have disappeared. The only ones who stuck were the ones who bothered to learn and respect the music industry."

Originally comprised of music wholesalers, retailers and distributors, the Music Business Association had already begun to broaden its scope during the tenure of James Donio, Sabin's predecessor — a shift indicated in 2013, when the organization changed its name from the National Association of Recording Merchandisers (NARM) to the broader moniker it has today. Continuing that expansion was one of Sabin's early priorities.

"We've made a concerted effort to be inclusive, to reach out to companies that are coming in, like tech startups, that are doing cool things and solving problems that people have," Sabin says.

ROUNDTABLE: GRAHAM DODD. SABIN: NASHVILLE CORPORATE PHOTOGRAPHY.

MIDiA Research's Tatiana Cirisano (center) at the UMG Mixer at Music Biz 2022.

The music business, she notes, is "an ever-changing landscape, and I think it's one of those things you have to be comfortable with when you set out to have an inclusive trade association."

Today, the Music Business Association has several initiatives to more broadly serve the music industry. For example, the Music Biz conference has added programming that focuses on the touring and ticketing industry "because that part of our business has always weirdly been a little bit separate," Sabin says. "I certainly found out when I was running a record label that that whole live side was sort of its own animal. The booking agents are over there, the promoters, the big talent agencies."

Ahdritz

But the pandemic highlighted the fact that the music business "is an ecosystem and we all rely on each other, and when one goes down, the whole goes down," says Sabin of the live sector. "So we have made a big effort since 2019 to get those folks involved."

The conference's programming style has also evolved. "We have discovered the power of creating tracks for discussion," Sabin says. "It helps people get more in-depth knowledge. If you're going to do three panels on a topic, one right after the other and everybody is having the conversation together, that makes it stronger, so we're doing quite a lot of tracks at this year's Music Biz."

Sabin's desire for a larger tent extends beyond the types of companies that make up the Music Business Association. Achieving a more inclusive board "was a huge goal for me," Sabin says. "It has taken us four years, but now we've gotten to 52% people of color on the board, 57% women, as well as a nice, wide range of diversity in company type. I think that's also really important."

"She formed a diversity, equity and inclusion committee pretty much immediately, so that was a core element of building and reconsidering the organization," says Downtown Music Holdings chief marketing officer Molly Neuman, who recalls that Sabin's early priorities included making the organization's board more diverse and expanding the voices heard at its events. "That was in place when George Floyd was murdered and we had Blackout Tuesday and all the things that happened in the summer of 2020, so we already had this core unit considering these things for the industry, but we were also in a position to offer mutual support as well as long-term plans."

That commitment to inclusion was illustrated recently when the Nashville-based Music Business Association issued a statement decrying anti-LGBTQ+ bills passed by the Tennessee Legislature.

Broadening the scope of the Music Business Association also includes an effort to increase the involvement of younger music professionals. "We have a programming track called #NextGen_Now, and we tried our first physical event with them [in March] in Nashville," Sabin says. "We had a cocktail mixer and it was incredibly successful; they all had to be kicked out at the end of the evening because they were enjoying themselves too much, which is great."

The association is also reaching students through its #NextGen_U initiative. Like its predecessor, NARM, the Music Business Association has continued to offer scholarships to help the next generation of music business executives.

"The programming that we did online for them was very successful over the pandemic and we continued to do those through as recently as February of this year," says Sabin. "We think it's easier for students to attend a two-day virtual conference for $39 rather than flying and getting a hotel room. We also have an academic-partner newsletter now that we send out monthly."

Another recent Music Biz outreach echoes NARM's almost-forgotten 1970s-era playbook — the Road Show.

"For the vast majority of our members, their clients are actually artists and musicians and Music Biz [previously] didn't provide any forums for them to get in front of those people," Sabin says. "So I put together what we call the Music Biz Road Show. We usually partner with a trade association in a city and go for a day and do a mini Music Biz, where we put on some panels, maybe a fireside chat and a cocktail hour. The local trade association brings a couple hundred local artists so our members get to get in front of their actual clients, the people who they actually want to meet. And we get to do educational programming for those folks. It has been very successful so far.

"We've had them in Atlanta, Portland, Ore., and Memphis and we have them coming up in Huntsville, Ala., New Orleans and Miami," Sabin continues. "If my staff doesn't kill me, I would like to have at least one a month."

Amid such outreach, what are the priorities for this year's expanded Music Biz conference?

"I think everyone is always interested in what's coming next, so I think generative [artificial intelligence] is a conversation that people really want to have," Sabin says. "Because our conference is crowdsourced, it's really fun to see what topics come in over and over and which ones fall by the wayside.

"For example, we had the highest number of [programming suggestions] that anyone can ever remember receiving, like 326 proposals this year, and there was only one on [non-fungible tokens]. So you can tell that's no longer of concern to the membership."

But a perennial concern remains: "What are the revenue streams that are out there and how do we capture them? That is what the internet has done for the music industry; it has created boundless opportunities, with this scary downside of, 'How do [creators] collect [revenue for their creations]?'

"I feel like the music business has always been playing catch-up to technology," Sabin adds. "A new technology comes along and we spend 20 years figuring out how to get it monetized properly, and by that time another technology comes along. But it's happening so much faster right now and I think that's the central interest of our membership, and that's really what we are." b

CIRISANO: GRAHAM DODD. AHDRITZ: PAUL BRISSMAN.

BIZZY AWARD NOMINEES

LEADING LIGHT AWARD

- **Mike Heyliger**, The Orchard
- **Sarah Robertson**, A to Z Media
- TuneCore
- Warner Music Group

AGENT OF CHANGE AWARD

- mtheory Equal Access Development Program
- Recording Artists and Music Professionals With Disabilities (RAMPD)
- Sony Music Publishing
- Warner Music Group

#NEXTGEN_NOW ONE TO WATCH AWARD

- **Chris Dampier**, TuneCore
- **Jenna Gaudio**, Vydia
- **Sarah Janiszewski**, TIDAL
- **Lindsey Major**, The Mechanical Licensing Collective (The MLC)
- **Emilio Morales**, Rimas Publishing

MASTER OF METADATA AWARD

- **Kim Beauchamp**, Universal Music Group
- **Scott Farrant**, Kobalt Music
- BMAT Music Innovators
- Jaxsta

FRONTLINE INNOVATOR

- **D. Tobago Benito**, DBS Sounds/F.A.M.S. Coalition
- **Harry Crumpler**, T-Bones Records & Cafe
- Gallery of Sound
- Park Ave CDs

MARKETING SUPERSTAR

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- *Encanto* IRL Meta Reels Activation/Disney Music Group, Meta
- Jack White, *Fear of the Dawn, Entering Heaven Alive*/Third Man Records, The Orchard, Monotone
- Scene Queen/Hopeless Records

MUSIC BUSINESS EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

- **Kevin Block-Shwenk**, Berklee College of Music
- **Serona Elton**, Frost School of Music, University of Miami
- **Shea Fowler**, Belmont University/University of New Haven (Conn.)
- **Clyde Rolston**, Belmont University

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September 13, 2017
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August 24, 2018
August 26, 2018
September 15, 2018
November 17, 2018
March 3, 2019
April 4, 2019
April 6, 2019
April 7, 2019
April 10, 2019
September 15, 2022
September 17, 2022
September 14, 2023
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KANSAS
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KANSAS
ANOTHER FORK IN THE ROAD
50TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR

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From left: David Ragsdale, Ehart, Ronnie Platt, Williams, Tom Brislin and Billy Greer of Kansas in 2019.

KANSAS CARRIES ON

From Topeka to the world, the classic rock band looks back on five decades of success

BY GARY GRAFF

IT'S FAIR TO say the rock world didn't quite know what to make of Kansas when the band rolled out of Topeka 50 years ago.

The original sextet — guitarist Richard Williams, drummer Phil Ehart (who are both still with the band), guitarist-keyboardist Kerry Livgren, singer-keyboardist Steve Walsh, singer-violinist Robbie Steinhardt and bassist Dave Hope — looked like quintessential Midwesterners but traded in compositional and lyrical complexities that sounded like something from across the pond. Blending blues-based hard rock and intricate progressive constructions, Kansas staked out its own musical territory, at once original and accessible.

Signed to pop hit-maker Don Kirshner's label, Kirshner Records, in 1973, Kansas built its following with its first three albums, released between March 1974 and September 1975, and nonstop touring before 1976's quadruple-platinum *Leftoverture* and its massive hit, "Carry On Wayward Son," exploded, leading to the 1977 album *Point of Know Return* and its even more popular "Dust in the Wind," which reached No. 6 on the Billboard Hot 100 — the highest-charting hit of the band's career — in 1978. Those back-to-back successes cemented Kansas' status as a stalwart of album-oriented radio and helped the group become a sturdy heritage act, sustaining it through lineup changes (nine additional members over the years) and 11 more studio albums.

The good news is that, at 50, Kansas is still playing the game tonight — and beyond. Fans consider the group's current lineup to be one of its strongest, an opinion supported by its most recent albums — including 2020's *The Absence of Presence*.

Ehart and Williams say there's new music on tap for 2024, but at the moment they're reveling in a golden anniversary with last year's three-disc anthology, *Another Fork in the Road — 50 Years of Kansas*, and a celebration tour starting June 2 and running, so far, into January.

From left: Hope, Williams, Ehart, Steinhardt, Livgren and Walsh circa 1974.

Does it feel like 50 years? Fifty minutes? Five hundred years?

PHIL EHART Any of the above. (*Laughs.*) We never expected to go this long. I remember Rich saying that, initially, we were kind of hoping we'd have a song on Topeka radio and we probably wouldn't make it any longer than that. So we never really had any expectations of going for a long time. But we've been very lucky and very successful.

What has been the key to Kansas' durability, then?

RICHARD WILLIAMS It's not like it was really a goal as much as it was an acceptance of "This is what I do," and then get up every morning and just take the next positive step to the horizon, really. Phil and I got into this because this is what we wanted to do with our lives.

EHART I think we're pretty doggone good at what we do, so that's a big plus. We've had Kerry and Steve writing great songs, and the band has been good playing the songs and recording the songs and touring the songs and everything else, and we're hard workers. It's just hanging in there, basically.

So much of the story of Kansas is that it's not the typical "heartland" rock band that everyone expects to come from that part of the country. How did you wind up sounding like you did — and still do?

EHART I think it has to do with the time period. When we were forming, it was right at the time the band Emerson, Lake & Palmer was coming out, Yes was coming

2019: EMILY BUTLER. 1974: DON HUNSTEIN/SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT.

CONGRATULATIONS TO

KANSAS

50 YEARS

OF CARRYING ON

From left: Steinhardt, Williams, John Elefante, Ehart, Hope and Livgren in 1982.

out, Genesis. That stuff was just starting to hit the United States and those bands were influencing Kerry, who was our main songwriter at the time — not necessarily that we would be copying them, but it showed us you could play different time signatures and things like that. We could do a song like "Carry On Wayward Son"; all the different changes in that song might not have been performed before, especially on a single.

WILLIAMS Everybody had different influences, very eclectic… but we were tired of playing the required music you'd play in a bar. We were very inspired by what became called progressive music. That taught us you can sing about anything you want to, you can use any time signature, any approach you can think of, any instrumentation that appealed to us. We didn't want to emulate anything or copy the trends on radio. We wanted to do things our way — and we were very stubborn in that.

EHART The big difference is that Kansas was always a two-guitar rock band. Yeah, we had keyboards, we had a violin and stuff like that and could play proggy-sounding stuff. But Kansas is a kick-butt rock band with two guitars and lent itself to stuff like that — although one of our biggest songs we ever had was [the ballad] "Dust in the Wind." But we would always do different things to keep it interesting. I think the fans appreciated that, too.

Given Don Kirshner's background with The Monkees and The Archies, he still seems an unlikely champion for a band like yours.

EHART That's true. We never had another offer; nobody showed any interest except him. We could never figure out what he saw in us, a bunch of long-haired guys in jeans, cowboy boots and overalls from Topeka, Kan. To this day, we still scratch our heads and go, "Wow. Whatever he saw in us, he definitely delivered." He made it happen. He put his money where his mouth was and let us make very good albums, and they weren't cheap. He gave us tour support. And of course he recouped, but the point is he believed in us and was willing to invest in these young guys. Man, we owe that guy a lot.

That was an era when bands had time to develop and build an audience. Was the pressure on by the time you got to *Leftoverture*?

WILLIAMS Kirshner was patient, but… by the third album [*Masque*], there was a little more pressure; the feeling was it was time to deliver. But that would never happen today, being given all that money to record three, four albums in hopes of something coming out of us. Donnie was patient with us, and *Leftoverture* exploded.

Did "Carry On Wayward Son" feel like a hit when you wrote and recorded it?

EHART Often I go back to [producer] Jeff Glixman's comment while we were sitting in the control room listening… He looked over and said, "You know, if this wasn't us, I would think this is probably going to be a hit single," which was a brilliant thing to say — if it wasn't Kansas, it would probably be a hit. But it was Kansas and it was a hit, which made it even stranger. And not just a hit in Topeka, but across the world.

WILLIAMS We felt really good about it — I mean, really good about it. Don Kirshner kept calling, and we were holding up the phone to the speakers and he was listening and everybody in New York was very excited. But it wasn't until we really started digging into the mixes that it hit us: "Wow. This is something different. This is going to be a game-changer."

"Dust in the Wind" was an even bigger chart hit and, as Phil notes, very unusual. How out of left field did that feel for the band?

WILLIAMS Yeah, it was outside of the box of what we had done before. It's an acoustic song — no drums, just acoustic guitar, violin and voice. But we knew it was a great song. What's funny in retrospect is that song and "Wayward Son," we got a lot of heat from the press as far as, "Oh, Kansas has sold out." By definition, selling out would be jumping on the mainstream trend and mimicking it. What about "Dust in the Wind" was mimicking anything to do with the mainstream? It was an absolute fluke that it was a big hit, extremely lucky. Yeah, there was a much more progressive side to the band, but this was just a different type of song for us, and we liked that. Even "Wayward Son" wasn't emulating [any other] music of that time. We just stumbled into some hits.

What was the chemistry of the original six of you that was so special?

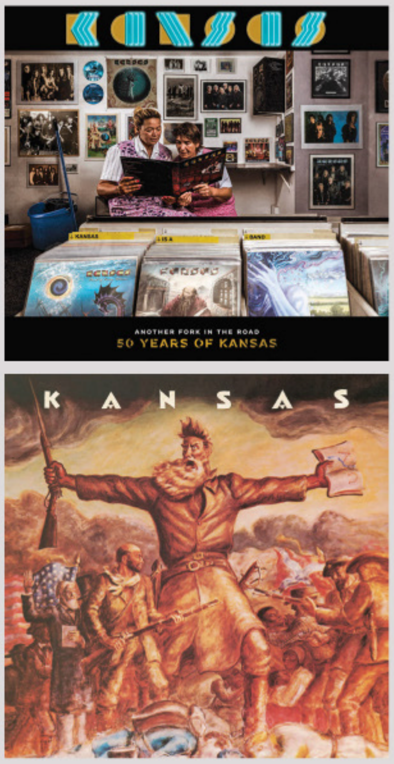
EHART Well, four of us went to high school together. We had played in local bands together, so we knew each other. Steve Walsh and Robbie actually didn't live in Topeka, but we were all within 60 miles of each other. So the dynamic was six Kansas guys that had grown up in the music scene there; we had a lot in common and we hit it off not only personally but musically.

WILLIAMS We'd all been playing in the same or different bands, cover bands, etc. We'd kind of become the last men standing of our peer group that wanted to continue with a musical life rather than getting a straight job. The motivation was very pure in that we were living in the moment, not worrying about the future, not considering the financial aspects as much as making just enough to get by and keep doing what we wanted to do — our way.

Kansas has been through a lot of lineup changes over the years. Was that the Greek philosopher Heraclitus pictured on the cover of *Leftoverture*, whose view was that change is the only constant in life?

WILLIAMS Phil and I have made peace that change is going to happen: "OK… So what's the plan?" And you make the switch and you move forward. That's it. We've kept moving forward. Every step of the way was, "OK, what are we going to do next?" It's just tenacity, I guess.

EHART There's a small paragraph on the cover of our first album that says, "Kansas is a band." It's not Kansas featuring somebody or certain people. When Kansas plays, it sounds like Kansas. If there's a bit of rotating of members under the moniker of Kansas, then so be it. So this time Kansas is going to be Steve Morse playing guitar — boy, what a great addition he was. Or David Ragsdale on violin. Or Ronnie Platt coming in, or Billy Greer on bass. There has been a lot of different people coming and going, but it's all under the auspices of the band. We go out and do what we do best, which is write and play Kansas music.


KANSAS
ANOTHER FORK IN THE ROAD
50 YEARS OF KANSAS
K A N S A S

Top: Cover of *Another Fork in the Road — 50 Years of Kansas*. Bottom: Cover of Kansas' 1974 self-titled album.

Have you ever come close to stopping?

EHART Well… no. We can't find a reason to, you know? First of all, we love it. And when we play, people come to see us. We've sold millions and millions and millions of records and had millions of people buy tickets and come to our concerts. We've done really well, so we can't find a reason to not do it. If we were sick and tired of it we would quit, but we're not. ◼

MUSIC VIDEO: BOB RIHA JR./GETTY IMAGES. ANOTHER FORK COVER: COURTESY OF CENTURY MEDIA RECORDS. SELF-TITLED COVER: COURTESY OF SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT.

APA

LEGENDARY

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LOS ANGELES NEW YORK ATLANTA NASHVILLE TORONTO LONDON

PARIS PALOMA

The singer-songwriter eyes a busy summer after "Labour" struck a chord with TikTok users

On the final day of a weeklong studio session in Los Angeles last fall, Paris Paloma knew she had something special as she recorded the climactic bridge to "Labour" with her backup singers. "That was a moment where I was like, 'This is coming together now,' " the 23-year-old U.K. singer-songwriter recalls. "Us women, all shouting in a room — I was like, 'This is what it's about.' " Since its March release, the stormy alt-folk anthem has inspired no shortage of women doing exactly that. "Labour" became a sensation on TikTok for Paloma's mighty vocals and powerful message about having to do all the emotional heavy lifting in a relationship, and the track eventually scored a No. 9 debut on *Billboard*'s Hot Alternative Songs chart (dated April 8) and a No. 13 high on the all-genre Digital Song Sales listing.

Hailing from Ashbourne, Derbyshire, in England, Paloma began writing music at 14 years old and started releasing her own work in 2020. Soon after, she connected with High Plateau Productions owner/CEO David Fernandez following a virtual songwriter session at the start of the pandemic. "Paris was the first to sing, and literally, as soon as she opened her mouth, I pinged her on Instagram," recalls Fernandez, who officially came on as her manager in 2021. "The content that she writes about and the meaningfulness of her lyrics touches me as a music listener."

Paloma scored a minor breakthrough the following year with her biblically framed relationship analysis "The Fruits," attracting the attention of record label Nettwerk Records, which she signed with that fall. Before long, she was recording in a proper studio for the first time, working on "Labour" — a song she had originally written as two separate works before realizing they shared a theme. Even before it was put to tape, though, the track was growing on TikTok thanks to a teaser clip that Paloma posted after writing the lyrics. "It was just a video of me in my room singing," she says. "But it gave me a little indicator that was like, 'OK, I think this is something that I want to be heard, and I think people want to hear it.' "

Though Paloma has amassed hundreds of thousands of TikTok followers, Fernandez is insistent that neither of them want her to be seen as a "TikTok artist." Rather than release sped-up or slowed-down versions of "Labour," she will soon drop a totally reimagined, more orchestral version of the song with production duo MyRiot. She's also preparing her live act for shows at 300- to 500-capacity spaces in London and festival dates at Summerfest and Bonnaroo, ahead of a debut album that Fernandez says fans can expect in July or August. By then, it will have been about a year since she wrote "Labour." "In that time, I've written a lot newer music," Paloma says. "You always think that your most recent stuff is the best because it's the most accurate reflection of where your creativity is. I've got so much work I want to get out." —ANDREW UNTERBERGER

No. 9

PEAK ON *BILLBOARD'S* HOT ALTERNATIVE SONGS CHART

Paloma photographed by Nicole Nodland on April 18 in London.

BORA AKSU DRESS AND COAT. SET DESIGNER: SIMON PICKTHORNE.

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